THE MONUMENTAL LITERATURE OF DWARFS

Chronicles of Culture

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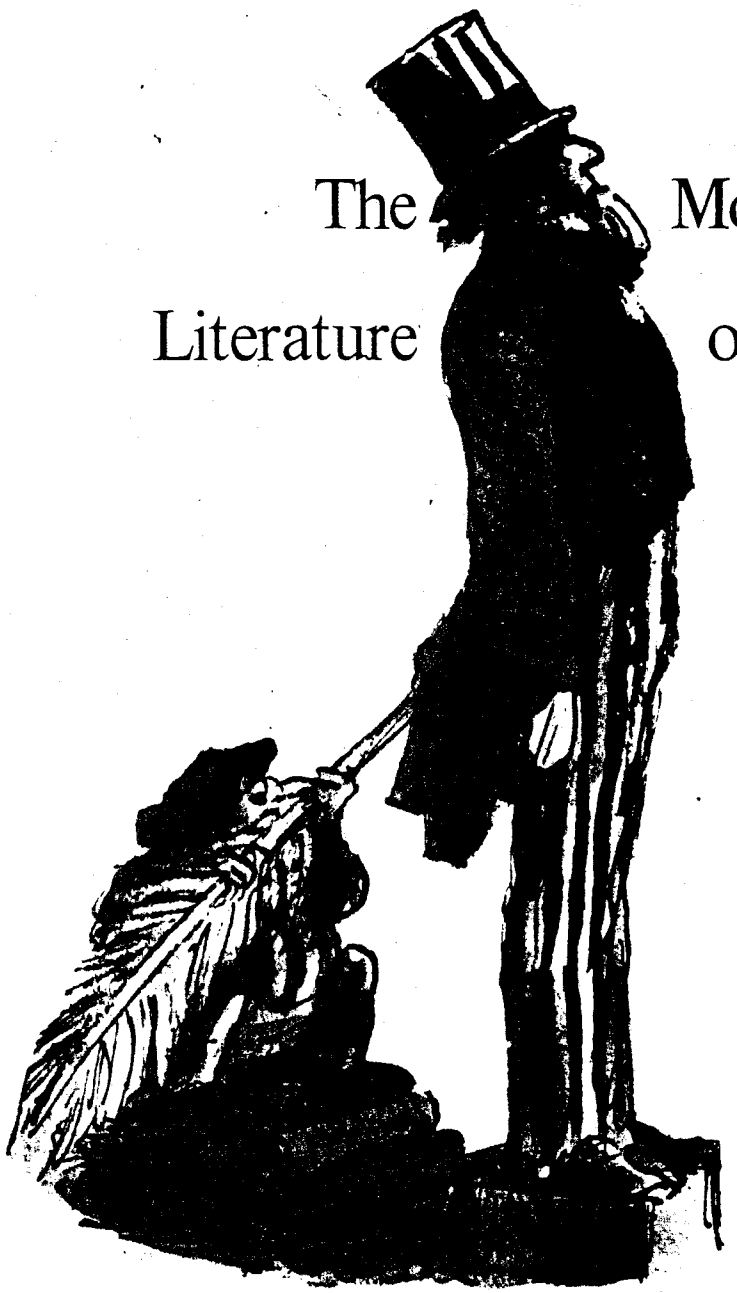
The Monumental Literature of Dwarfs



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COMMENT

God keep you safe from fire and steel and contemporary literature. . . .

—Léon Bloy

The old aphorism that one picture is worth a thousand words sometimes reaches a level of startling profundity. A photographer at the Jewish Museum's Robert Rauschenberg retrospective in 1963 captured a scene that transforms the aphorism into manifest truth. An elegantly coiffured woman in an exquisite mink coat peers intently at Rauschenberg's *Monogram,* obviously determined to force the work to disgorge its deepest meaning. Not an unusual sight in an art museum, but for one small matter: *Monogram* is composed of a stuffed Angora goat with an automobile tire around its middle. Has the art fancier discovered the 20th century's answer to Michelangelo's *Pieta?* She may not be sure, but one thing is certain: if the cognoscenti say this is art, then art it is. No one wants to be left on the platform when the Avant-Garde Express rolls out of the station.

Not to be outdone, American novelists have produced their own *Monograms;* an embarrassment of riches exists here: Mailer, Vonnegut, Updike, Heller, Brautigan, Vidal, Doctorow, Irving—everyone can supply his own candidates. What these gentlemen write may not be great literature—or even literature, for that matter—but if it bears the imprimatur of the *New York Times* or *Time* magazine, then the philistines in mink will clamor to read it. Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, James, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner might as well step aside gracefully, for the era of dwarfs has emerged with a simper and a smirk. In this day of aesthetic democracy anyone with a typewriter and a carefully exploited glandular disorder can call himself a novelist, in the process acquiring a bank account that the president of General Motors would envy.

How is it that writers whom Faulkner would have made go around to the back door have won positions of honor in the contemporary republic of letters? Eschewing the tempting explanation of mass idiocy, we must lay the blame at the feet of the high priests of the Liberal Culture. These literary taste-makers—ensconced in the pages of *Time, The Nation, Village Voice, The New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*—have formulated the criteria with which to judge contemporary literary achievement. They beat the drums for those writers who play the game according to their rules.

These rules are not very esoteric; it requires no arcane knowledge to discern the secrets of literary success. One begins with a modicum of writing talent; this requirement bars few candidates from admission, for does anyone believe that Kurt Vonnegut actually brings anything new or commanding into the contemporary art of writing? Style matters little; what counts is correctness of content. Chief among these key elements is a well-chiseled rejection, or even a thoroughgoing hatred, of all things American, especially anything that bears the stigma of the despised middle-class ethos, cultural values, normative principles. From *Book of Daniel* to *Loon Lake,* Edgar Doctorow has worked this vein with a crazed single-mindedness. It helps enormously if the writer exhibits a flagrant contempt for such grotesque, or just laughable, concepts as honor, duty, patriotism and virtue. But he need not attack these attributes directly; if he prefers, he can ignore them and crawl into his own navel, there to celebrate his special solipsistic vision, free from the trammeling concerns of real people in a real world. Whining self-pity goes a long way as well, for how else can one explain the critics' insatiable hunger for feminist abuse of empirical knowledge and rudimentary common sense disguised as novels? Last—but certainly not least—sexual acrobatics have become *de rigueur.* Incest, pederasty, bestiality and the solitary vice as exemplifications of self-realized "humanness" command the highest prices, but, if one is old-fashioned, random heterosexual coupling will do. Mix these elements together in the proper proportion, and the writer may find himself part of a Big Literary Event; if the gods bestow their full bounty upon him he will grace the cover of *Time.*

Although a novelist ignores this formula at great risk to his career, this does not mean that a writer who goes his

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own way will relegate himself to obscurity; the literary taste-makers are too smart to ignore a Saul Bellow—besides, even the daftest of critics occasionally snares a stray insight. The real problems lie elsewhere. The Liberal Culture ignores or derides writers of exceptional talent who cannot command the recognition that a Bellow does. Andrew Lytle, for example, has, over the course of his long lifetime, written four superb novels, one of which—*The Velvet Horn*—weaves symbol and myth into a story of such complex grandeur that a John Cheever or a William Styron would hang his head in shame if he honestly compared his own paltry endeavors to Mr. Lytle's work. Robert Drake, Marion Montgomery and Madison Jones have written fiction that goes unread, while the mob clamors for Erica Jong and John Irving. And what of John O'Hara, America's closest response to Balzac, or James Gould Cozzens, a man who spoke of honor with something other than derision?

Even worse than the way in which the taste-makers treat the work of these men is the Liberal Culture's glorification of literary dwarfs whose books become cynosures which are proclaimed as evidence of American cultural achievement. To write a *Ragtime* or a *World According to Garp* is the tormenting dream of every callow undergraduate English major who longs to transmute his endocrinological urges into the Great American Novel. Like fleas on a coonhound's belly, the land crawls with aspiring writers who lust to see their dreary scribblings in print, and, given the state of the publishing industry, a good deal of this rubbish will eventually appear between hard covers.

The discriminating reader can be forgiven if the contemporary American literary scene drives him to the bottle. The thought of posterity judging our culture by a Norman Mailer or a Gore Vidal is almost more than a decent man can bear. But despair is the most grievous of sins, so one must have faith that time will take its toll on the reputations created by the Liberal Culture; as white-haired Southern ladies like to say: "Breeding and class will tell." When the dust has settled on our era, the fakers and poseurs will have been forgotten, and the *real* writers will be honored. But this may not be consolation enough for those who are condemned to live in this age of drivel. We need not stand by helplessly, though, for we can act without waiting upon posterity to separate the weevils from the cotton. We must uncover the sham, the phoniness, the sleaziness of the fiction glorified by the Liberal Culture. We must strip the cloak from the poseur and reveal the tawdriness of the artist manqué. Much of the literature of our time will then stand exposed for what it is: The Monumental Literature of Dwarfs.

—*James J. Thompson, Jr.*

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Social Register

A new book has been written by a professor of literature at Cornell University—a lady with peculiar taste and lop-sided irony. It is exactly the impenetrability of her message and style, the lack of distinction between what the authoress finds amusing and what she considers an enlightening insight, that destines her *oeuvre* to become a triumph among fashionable circles. It's called *The Language of Clothes,* and it's must reading for anyone who expects to hold his/her own during animated conversations in the lofts of Soho, Central Park West salons, East Side penthouses and Malibu cabanas. Literacy is not required, as the volume abounds in illustrations. Here is a representative excerpt:

> Psychologists say that the walking stick or rolled umbrella is a male symbol when it appears in dreams; and in waking life men can often be seen using these symbolic objects to poke and prod or to signal for taxis in a way that bears out this interpretation. Walking sticks are now rare except among men who really need them, but the umbrella remains popular. As might be expected, the male version tends to be large and heavy, and to gain prestige from a capacity for instant deployment. A shabby, small, or—worst of all—ill-functioning umbrella is a source of shame which often seems excessive unless some erotic meaning is presumed. Of course, when the umbrella is actually unfolded it assumes a less phallic shape—which may be why upper-class British males often keep theirs tightly rolled even in a heavy drizzle.
>
> The male hat too has been considered a sexual symbol. . . .

And on and on it goes, with the same coy certitude, the charming seriousness of a major research statement. We felt perplexed at first—we've been to England countless times and have seen a staggering number of upper-class British males with *un*folded umbrellas during even a light drizzle. Were they all hermaphrodites?

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Things He Believed In

The Eisenhower Diaries; Edited by Robert H. Ferrell; W. W. Norton & Co.; New York.

by Allan C. Carlson

Academicians of any orthodox persuasion have always been uncomfortable with the legacy of Dwight Eisenhower. When his second Presidential term came to an end in early 1961, they joyfully dismissed him as an intellectual lightweight, a mere West Point graduate, an aging warrior whom time had passed by, while his administration was coolly mocked as "the bland leading the bland." The professors were eager to get on with reshaping the nation and the world in the heroic images drawn by Rostow, Galbraith and Schlesinger. The 1950's—an age characterized by bourgeois dullness, an obsession with business and family matters, an abiding mediocrity—had gratefully come to an end; the great adventure could begin.

Nearly two decades later, the orthodox academicians raised their bruised frames above the moral and intellectual ruins, contemplated the failed Presidencies and social decay of the 1960's and 1970's, and concluded that Eisenhower was in fact a great leader. Yet the transformation required a few alterations in the Eisenhower image. According to these revisionists, for example, Ike really wasn't much of a conservative. In fact, he appears in retrospect to have been something of a closet liberal. As described by scholars such as Fred Greenstein, Robert Divine and Burton Kaufman, Eisenhower was a "politically astute and informed" leader who applied a carefully honed concept of leadership to the conduct of his Presidency. They portray Ike as incessantly battling the obscurant wing of the Republican Party, pressing for an internationalist foreign policy, defending the New Deal reforms, backing the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Topeka* decision, quietly yet purposefully undermining Senator Joe McCarthy, distrusting Nixon, fighting the Pentagon to hold down defense costs, using John Foster Dulles as a front while himself directing American foreign policy towards peace and rapprochement with the Soviet Union, keeping the U.S. out of Vietnam and guiding the foreign-aid program away from an obsession with military security and Western Europe and toward economic purposes and the developing nations.

One can understand the professors' anxious efforts to transform Eisenhower into one of their own, and there are elements of truth in most of what they say. Recently declassified foreign-policy documents from the 1950's, for example, have provided a more complex and flattering perspective on Eisenhower's role in that period. Moreover, the discovery and publication of a series of diaries kept by Eisenhower intermittently from 1935 until his death in 1969 have provided fresh insight into the mind, attitudes and world view of an exceptionally "private" public figure.

Yet the effort to rework Eisenhower into a minor hero in the liberal pantheon simply won't work. The Eisenhower diaries do provide a common denominator to Eisenhower's life, philosophy and political program, yet it is one in which most of the professors can personally take little comfort. As the diary entries make clear, Eisenhower believed fervently in traditional moral and family values, in the concepts of duty, honesty, personal responsibility and patriotism, and in the justice and efficacy of the free-enterprise system. His greatest fears focused on communist expansion internationally and on creeping statism, immorality and personal irresponsibility at home. The diaries, quite simply, portray the Eisenhower most persons would expect, a prototype of the contemporary conservative temperament.

Such traits were a legacy from Eisenhower's family experience, particularly the example set by his father. In 1942, on the day of his father's funeral, Ike sat in his wartime office at the Pentagon and wrote: "He was a just man, well liked, well educated, a thinker. He was undemonstrative, quiet, modest, and of exemplary habits—he never used alcohol or tobacco. . . . His word has been his bond and accepted as such; his sterling honesty, his insistence upon the immediate payment of all debts, his pride in independence earned for him a reputation that has profited all of us boys. . . . My only regret is that it was always so difficult to let him know the great depth of my affection for him." Emotional reticence characterizes the diaries. Yet it is significant that Eisenhower's few other recorded flights of feeling—e.g. during a 1938 trip with his father to Yellowstone or on the pending arrival of his first grandchild—centered on family-related events. Eisenhower, in fact, saw his own family as an example "of what this country with its system of individual rights and freedoms, its boundless resources, and its opportunities for all who want to work can do for its citizens. . . ."

Eisenhower's loyalties are also transparently simple. In 1939, he wrote that,

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"My entire life has been given to this one thing, my country and my profession." Twelve years later, he cited "my family" and "America" as "the only real passions of my life." Countless references to "duty" and "responsibility" fill the diaries.

Prior to the end of World War II, it is true, Eisenhower evidences no well-thought-out or articulated political philosophy. By early 1953, though, he had developed and repeatedly expressed a world view that would remain essentially unchanged throughout his Presidency. During thirty-five years of diary-keeping, Eisenhower only once inserted a newspaper clipping into the text, namely the January 4, 1950 farewell editorial of the New York *Sun*. He referred in particular to a concluding paragraph, which read:

> Throughout [the *Sun's*] career it has supported constitutional government, sound money, reasonable protection for American industry, economy in public expenditures, preservation of the rights and responsibilities of the several states, free enterprise, good citizenship, equality before the law, and has upheld all the finer American traditions. It has opposed indecency and rascality, public and private. It has fought Populism, Socialism, Communism, governmental extravagance, the encroachments of bureaucracy and that form of government paternalism which eats into the marrow of private initiative and industry.

Eisenhower flatly declared: "These are the things in which I believe." He also despaired that such principles were increasingly discarded, yet personally vowed to "go down fighting." At other times in the 1945-53 period, Eisenhower stated that American strength rested on faith, free enterprise, moral probity and necessary military strength; described "moral regeneration" and a "revival of patriotism" as necessary; labeled capitalism as "essential" to democracy; termed federal aid to private education "immoral"; saw the federal government—in the name of "social security"—taking ever-greater power over people's daily lives; praised "Americanism" while railing against "the hand-out state" and "the regulatory spirit"; became persuaded that it was his duty "to unseat the New Deal-Fair Deal bureaucracy in Washington"; and concluded that free government was necessarily based on "some form of deeply felt religious faith."

Even Eisenhower's efforts to restrain military spending were not born (à la McGovern or Carter) out of distrust of the military mind, sympathies for the world revolution or fear of American motives. They rested instead on a thoroughly conservative fear of the dangers which a large defense establishment posed to the fiscal and social arrangements of a free society. Ike was aware that "If we are not [internally] healthy, we can communicate no health to the world"; in the face of military financial demands, he worried about "the poor tax payer." Most significantly, he argued that *"the purpose of America is to defend a way of life* rather than merely to defend property, territory, homes or lives," and concluded "that excessive expenditure for nonproductive [defense] items could, in the long run, destroy the American economy." At a time when American liberals were clamoring for higher defense budgets as a stimulus to the economy, Eisenhower found early in his Presidency that his views on taxation, defense spending and domestic policy actually coincided to a surprising degree with those held by Senator Robert Taft, the erstwhile leader of the Republican far right. (Even so, it is worth noting that Eisenhower's now-praised "lean" defense budgets absorbed a significantly higher share of the nation's Gross National Product than would Ronald Reagan's widely attacked defense projections for the mid-1980's.)

Again reflecting the conservative conscience of their author, the Eisenhower diaries convey a deep pessimism about the future: specifically, a sense that the nation and the world were beginning to spin out of control and despair over the failure of a new generation of responsible leaders to emerge. In 1951, while commanding NATO, Eisenhower lamented over the "unworthy men" who guided Western destinies in London, Washington and Paris and "desperately" wished for "new, young, and virile civil and military leaders devoted only to their respective countries, to decency, and to security." In 1956, after a long conversation with Dulles, Eisenhower suggested that "the world is on the verge of an abyss" and that they would probably be succeeded by men of less experience, prestige, intellectual capacity and moral courage. "What will happen?" he asked with a sense of resignation.

> "Eisenhower revisionism is full of nostalgia for the 1950's and it is certainly true that if you were white, male, and middle class or better, it was the best decade of the century."
>
> —*The New Republic*

In sum, Eisenhower's self-styled "middle-of-the-road" philosophy is ill-suited for revision into closet liberalism. Eisenhower's appropriately admired sense of proportion and judgment (concerning Indochina, he noted as early as 1951 that "no military victory is possible in that kind of theater" and that "a union of minds and hearts" among the American people was indispensable to the success of a military commitment anywhere) was rooted in traditional conservative caution and a distrust of recklessly entered ideological crusades. A man of honor, Eisenhower saw in Joe McCarthy an opportunist and a scoundrel. Yet Ike also had no tolerance for government employees of questionable loyalty, and he quietly dismissed thousands from sensitive posts. Eisenhower did not at-

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tempt to dismantle the New Deal, but neither did he substantially add to it; he was later appalled by the Great Society experiments of the Johnson administration. In the last published diary entry, dated March 1967, Ike described Richard Nixon as "one of the ablest men" he knew, a man for whom he held "great affection."

Eisenhower presided over The American Decade, an era characterized by peace, domestic stability, economic growth, social progress, and the apogee of U.S. military and moral prestige in the world. Even long-apparent trends in American social life—a rising divorce rate, falling fertility, spreading juvenile delinquency, declining church membership—all reversed during this remarkable period of national confidence and vitality.

One man, of course, did not cause these changes. In fact, the above-mentioned developments all began during the Truman years. Yet Eisenhower's sense of balance, caution and moral purpose allowed them to continue and the nation to prosper. There is much about Eisenhower for all Americans to admire, but there is very little in his world view that contemporary liberals would find in their own ideological mirror. □

Ryan's World

William Ryan: *Equality;* Pantheon Books; New York.

by Lee Congdon

Consider, if you will, Professor Ryan's Manichaean world. In common with most of "us," he belongs to the "vulnerable majority" of long-suffering, systematically exploited Americans. While we struggle, with varying degrees of success, to eke out a living, "they" — the tyrannical rich — indulge their every desire. We make payments on small foreign cars; they own Cadillacs outright. Our wives work; theirs idle away the hours. If fortune smiles, our children attend State University; theirs are graduated from Princeton, Harvard and Yale. In a word, we are the have-nots; they are the haves.

Why, Ryan asks rhetorically, do "so few of us get upset about the enormous inequalities in the ownership and the distribution of resources?" Because, you see, our artful masters have contrived to create in us a submissive consciousness. The mere mention of such "neoconservatives" as Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell and Daniel Patrick Moynihan is calculated to ignite Ryan's volatile passions. And with good reason. These reconstructed liberals champion the insidious ideology of "Fair Play," laughingly referred to as equal opportunity. Central to their propaganda, according to Ryan, is the quaint notion that we are, in some admittedly qualified sense, responsible for our own lives. Quite naturally this depressing news breeds in us a spirit of resignation and inferiority. And as if this were not enough, Ryan complains, our children are similarly indoctrinated. American schools are nothing if not "ideological instruments" that discriminate between good and poor students and encourage competition to the utmost limit, forbidding "cooperation with [one's] friends (they call it 'cheating')." It follows from all of this that conditions of inequality are neither natural nor fortuitous; Ryan and other disabused victims have often *"half* jokingly, spun out fantasies about a giant conspiracy [emphasis added]."

Although I have edited out the jargon of victimization ("sexism"; "racism"; "stereotyping"), this, or something closely approximating it, is Ryan's world. Yet his is no Spenglerian jeremiad, no counsel of final despair. Satisfied that he has decoded the ruling class's ideology, he speaks confidently of a *new* world, one in which "we" will finally receive our "Fair Share." At long last "we" will be equal with "them." Together we shall constitute a collectivity that, in the form of the state, will own the principal means of production and bring distribution in line with need, or perhaps I should say appetite, for "when what used to be luxuries become common possessions, they are, in fact, essential. It is difficult to do without them." For starters, we shall all have food and fuel stamps, free medical care and the run of theaters, concert halls and ballparks. Let the good times commence!

All in due course. Ryan does not foresee an immediate and total socio-economic transformation. Such, he allows, is the stuff of utopia. Rather, we shall advance one step at a time—a kind of incremental apocalypse. Before surveying the strategies of *ressentiment,* I should explain that Ryan's own "consciousness" was formed during the 1960's, a time that he chooses to look upon as a golden age. Thus inspired, he advocates renewed "strikes, demonstrations, disruptions of all kinds." Faced "with enough instability and turmoil, the mighty and powerful do make concessions." And if they do not—what then? Despite repeated protestations of peaceful intent, Ryan knows full well that violence will ever be the final arbiter when a social order is subjected to incessant provocation. Indeed, he makes little effort to veil his threats. He chides the poor for refusing, even when they are starving, to plunder the rich; he imagines with evident pleasure the murder of "Herman," the Cro-Magnon property owner in one of his parables; and he recalls—"perhaps capriciously, but I think significantly"—*Tosca,* Act II. Significantly indeed. It is then that Tosca mortally wounds Scarpia, whom Ryan takes to be "the cop as fascist, the fascist as cop." In our author's fevered imagination, the

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historical role of Tosca, the individual acting alone, will in the future be played by the discontented masses in their great number.

However foolish and irresponsible, Ryan speaks for a sizable contingent of American intellectuals whose passion for equality is, in Tocqueville's memorable words, "ardent, insatiable, eternal, and invincible." It is this passion that determines the contradictory character of so much of their writing. Proponents of "sharing" and "community," they identify class struggle as history's motivating force. Critics of militarism, they incite civil strife. Lovers of mankind in the abstract, they can scarcely conceal their contempt for individual men and women. Adept at *Ideologiekritik,* they advertise equality as a self-evident principle from which an endless series of "rights" may be deduced. All persons, Ryan proclaims breathlessly, "have a *right* to a reasonable share of material necessities, a right to do constructive work, and a right of unhindered access to education, to gratifying social memberships, to participation in the life and decisions of the community, and to all the major amenities of society."

At the very least, these extravagant claims should occasion a rethinking of "natural right." *Are* we endowed with certain inalienable rights? And if so, what are they? Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Membership in the country club? Straight A's? More to the point, perhaps, where do we find the enforcing agency? If I prevent an eligible black citizen from exercising the franchise, I can be held accountable by law. But before whom can I be legally called if I deny that same citizen his imagined right to "gratifying social membership"? For aught I know, there may be rights without number embedded in the nature of things, but before they become enforceable, they must be translated into statutory law. That is one reason why conservatives from Burke to Allen Tate (in his brilliant biography of Stonewall Jackson) have insisted that rights are not abstract and universal, but concrete and particular. They derive not from Mr. Jefferson's (much less Professor Ryan's) reading of nature, but from the historical *decisions* of an entire people.

Not surprisingly, Ryan does not take the trouble to ask why it is that so many of the greatest Western thinkers have campaigned against historical acceptance of the egalitarian principle. Yet the answer is not far to seek. To begin with, equality and liberty—often linked together in a thoughtless manner—are incompatible ideals. Since the early days of the New Deal, the conditions of American life have certainly become more equal, but few would describe them as more free, for as Ryan concedes, equality must be imposed—in our case by bureaucrats, congressmen and judges. Then too, the egalitarian agenda entails an ever-greater centralization of power. The Federal government must command increased authority if it is to ensure equality of condition throughout the land; independent power at the state or local level might well stall egalitarian initiatives. That, of course, is precisely the argument made by champions (such as Ryan) of ERA; the ratification of which would place new and potentially awesome powers in Federal hands.

To be sure, Ryan and his ilk do not deny any of this; they are unabashed worshipers of the state. I do not suggest that the functions of the Federal government can or should be restricted to those assigned to it in the 18th century. But it can scarcely be denied that the erosion of state and local power has abandoned atomized individuals to the mercy of the central authority. Dictators have certainly been quick to seize upon the possibilities presented by this circumstance. Although Napoleon, for example, trumpeted French Revolutionary principles, he was judicious enough to choose *égalité* in every contest with *liberté.*

The erosion of liberty and the concentration of power—with these we are familiar. Less widely recognized, I think, is the danger equality poses to every form of discrimination. Already the word is almost exclusively employed in the pejorative sense, yet the ability to discriminate is the very foundation of epistemological, moral and aesthetic reasoning, hence of civilized life. If, Ryan asks, the purpose of education is not to facilitate social mobility and to promote "absolute equality," what *can* it be? The answer is that education purposes to prepare us to make ever more refined distinctions. I prefer to think that even beginning students recognize Shakespeare to be a greater writer than, say, Jack Kerouac. Graduates ought to be able to distinguish between the author of *King Lear* and gifted, but lesser, writers such as Dickens and Balzac. The most unsophisticated freshman should (but probably does not) know that Mozart is to be preferred to the most recent rock group, but a senior should be able to give reasons for ranking the former above Haydn. In the final analysis, teachers endeavor to sharpen their students' discriminatory faculties because life itself would be meaningless without them. A case in point is Will Rogers's celebrated remark that he had never met a man he did not like. That being so,

"By now, it seems, the inegalitarians can get away with anything, and in an era when tracts such as William Simon's *Time for Truth* or Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose* or George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty* can ride the best-seller list, it may seem peevish to dwell on the shortcomings of Ryan's book. In intelligence and accuracy *Equality* is more than a match for what I have read of these other works; in intention and informing spirit it is their superior."

—*The New Republic*

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what would it *mean* to be liked by the American humorist? What would the words "I love you" mean if he who spoke them truly loved everyone equally? How should we ever know what it means to sing well if some of us, Pavarotti and Freni for instance, did not sound very different than others? If every singer possessed precisely the same talent, we would never be *conscious* of the beauty of the human voice. Simply put, meaning is inseparable from hierarchical structures.

To Ryan, of course, this kind of argument is anathema. He takes the position that distinction of merit cannot in principle ever be made because there exists no precise instrument of measure. But discriminations do not depend upon an "objective" instrument; they are made possible by human judgment, or more properly, by educated and experienced human judgment. Such judgment is admittedly fallible, but it is not arbitrary. Few men or women of culture have contested the greatness of Dostoyevsky and Mann, Bach and Beethoven, Raphael and Rembrandt. True, errors of judgment have been made and reputations have been won and lost, but there has been remarkable accord over the years concerning many creative artists, just as there has been with respect to standards of human conduct. To deny the capacity of men to make reasoned, authoritative judgments about those things that are good, true and beautiful is to deny that thinking is possible—it is to embrace nihilism, the ideology of barbarism. □

The Imagination Freak

John Irving: *The Hotel New Hampshire;* E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Betsy Clarke

Somewhere between Peyton Place and Animal House stands The Hotel New Hampshire, symbol of vision in blindness, order in chaos, dream in reality, comedy in tragedy. The possibilities, like John Irving's new novel, seem endless.

Pursuing these of life's puzzles in the three hotels so named are the dreamer Win Berry, his long-suffering (and doomed) wife, five children, relatives, various friends, enemies and animals. Father attempts three times to run a hotel with that "proper combination of class and democracy," each try ending with failure and sometimes devastation. Father's quest sends the Berrys from New Hampshire to Vienna to New York to Maine, during which time they come to terms with prostitution, incest, homosexuality, violence, love and death.

What is a person to make of it all? "Sorrow floats," offers John, the middle child and narrator. "There are no happy endings," Father observes. Being stuffed is "the next best thing to being alive," intones Frank, the oldest son and a homosexual who later adds that religion is just another form of taxidermy. *"Everything's* safer than love," contributes sister Franny, part-time lesbian and budding actress. And so forth. All of which serves to identify the author's central dilemma: how to create aphorisms which sound substantial enough to impress the highbrows and yet trendy enough to get silk-screened onto T-shirts.

John Irving is an admirer of imagination for its own sake. Says sister Lilly of Susie, an unattractive woman who goes through life as a bear, "It may be stupid to go through life as a bear . . . but you'll have to admit it takes imagination." Maybe so. But imagination isn't inspiration, nor is it vision. A reader may reasonably expect more from a late-20th-century novelist than the childish (and old) kicking-the-wrong-person-under-the-table gags. The worn-out caricatures have returned as well. Blacks are simple, good-natured and athletic. Jews are wily and enterprising. Texans are monied and loud. And the Berry family? As complicated and well-intentioned as any Wasp family, though, naturally, troubled. Otherwise, Irving's characters comprise a cacophony of special-interest groups: gays, feminists, blacks, radicals, the physically handicapped, the mentally ill. Those who worship at the altar of pluralism deformed for the liberal culture's use will feel right at home here.

"Everything is a fairy tale," Lilly, a writer and suicidal dwarf would say, and John comes to believe it. True, *The Hotel New Hampshire* incorporates both the fantasy and the violence characteristic of that genre. But unlike *Pinocchio,* for example, Irving's novel travels no moral terrain. The madcap adventures, stereotyped characters and deadly slapstick suggest nothing so much as cartoon. Indeed, *The Hotel New Hampshire* is merely an X-rated version of *The Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Show.* Never has a novel more blatantly fallen to its knees and cried, "Film me." Descriptions have been severely pared and action is king. This

"Only an oaf or a meanie could not be touched by a novel as eager and bumptious and cuddly as John Irving's THE HOTEL NEW HAMPSHIRE . . . It warms the mind, tickles the funnybone, squeezes the heart . . ."

—*Village Voice*

"We all want to check in to the Hotel New Hampshire."

—Jack Beatty
The New Republic

Miss Clarke is a frequent contributor to Chronicles.

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Ronald Reagan

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style can be an effective one, provided the author is skilled enough to evoke the proper emotion. But Irving is no Thomas Mallory. For all the destruction and mutilation, grief does not exist here.

When John's grandfather, Iowa Bob, dies in his arms of fright (second only to suicide as the most common cause of death in this novel), John silently eulogizes him: "as heavy and meaningful, to me, as our family bear." Touching, isn't it? Or, right after the Halloween gang rape, victim Franny remarks, *"Boy,* are you ever made to pay for a little fun." Gosh yes. Whether the event is an incestuous sexual marathon, a bombing or a plane crash (no survivors), Irving's tone remains one of amused condescension. Life certainly is a hodgepodge. What do you know about that.

John Irving's novel fails, really, not because it is too violent but because it is not violent enough. He needs to hear the story of someone who has actually witnessed death and mutilation at close range. Let him interview the victim of a gang rape to discover how she really talks. His imagination cannot help him with this task, for his novel covers a period of history (pre-World War II to the present) which witnessed unimaginable atrocity and pain: the Holocaust, numerous wars and revolutions, a changed Europe (in which much of this novel blithely takes place), mass starvation in Africa and Southeast Asia. Millions have endured unbearable suffering of an order that Mr. Irving will never know. It is not satisfactory for an author who professes to describe the way of the world to dismiss human misery with such cavalier good humor. Irving tells of a Viennese clown who reserves to himself the final word on the relationship between art and life. He announces, just before he leaps to his death, "LIFE IS SERIOUS BUT ART IS FUN!" How remarkable that Mr. Irving's latest effort resembles neither.

As much as anything, *The Hotel New Hampshire* is a book of slogans. Most of them impart obscure, rather perfunctory advice. "You've got to get obsessed and stay obsessed" is Iowa Bob's contribution. But the biggie, relentlessly repeated, is "Keep passing the open windows," the ultimate recipe for withstanding the lure of death, the formula for survival.

Here's something just as effective and a little more concrete: keep passing the open bookstores. □

Foreign Fiascos & Domestic Mire

Oscar Handlin: *The Distortion of America;* Atlantic/Little-Brown & Co.; Boston.

by Alan J. Levine

It is now generally clear, even to the ostrich-headed, that the United States and the rest of the Western world are facing the gravest sort of threats from the outside. Most people would agree that less-dramatic changes within the Western countries have not only exacerbated the external dangers but also pose a serious threat of their own. Oscar Handlin, one of America's leading historians, has attempted to examine these problems. Unfortunately, the resulting book, though worth reading, does not supply any new insights. It is inferior to the same author's *Truth in History,* a far more interesting discussion of the twisting of history for fashionable ideological purposes.

As Handlin sees it, the consensus that sustained postwar foreign policy has disappeared—even policy itself may have ceased to exist. Under President Carter "a sense of helplessness, of drift, of inability to control events often led to indecision." The Soviets are more aggressive than ever, while commitments to international law have weakened all over the world. Within the United States "the intellectuals, who should have articulated the country's views, ceased to do so and adopted an adversary posture that contributed to the dual loss of will and sense of purpose. Furthermore, liberalism by its own success destroyed the basis for consensus, without which Americans faced dangerous problems of security. All too often it was easier to evade or postpone problems than to confront them." Unfortunately, however, Handlin's book concentrates on the international situation and foreign policy. His analysis of it is generally quite accurate and sensible. But it is also often superficial—except for his examination of "neutralism," which is exceptionally penetrating and damning. It might have been better had Professor Handlin, a man of unrivaled knowledge of American social history, spent more time on examining our internal crisis; the parts of the book devoted to this topic are by far the most interesting and informative, dealing with something Handlin is uniquely qualified to explore. In contrast, his views on foreign affairs are mostly those which have long been conventional among neoconservatives and anticommunist liberals, and, on the whole, his treatment of these issues is less skillful than Norman Podhoretz's. Yet what he says is useful because it reveals some of the weaknesses of this line of thought. Although men like Podhoretz and Handlin deserve praise for their unremitting efforts to arouse the nation to an awareness of its danger, their views on how the peril arose are not always convincing.

Handlin, like anticommunist liberals, neoconservatives and perhaps many conservatives, sees the foreign policy of the Truman-Eisenhower era as a standard of excellence to emulate. He comments: "Regarded from the perspective of the historian, the present

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formed a striking contrast with the situation thirty years before," as though the 1950's were one of the sterling periods of Western history. In fact, even then some perceptive persons foresaw some of the disasters that have recently come to pass. Although Handlin recognizes that the consensus behind these policies was much more fragile than it seemed, he still regards the Truman policies as successful, a sort of maximum beyond which the West could not go. In this view, the policy of containment worked; only our departure from it was fatal. The decline in American power and the current threat to the West are perceived as phenomena of the last two decades. This belief, however, cannot withstand examination. No doubt American policy in the 40's and 50's was far more sensible than it was later, but the senseless management of the Indochina War and the delusions that finally culminated in the grand illusion of détente had their roots in mistakes made during the 50's. Nor was the Cold War going swimmingly for the West before the 1960's. We did not suddenly start losing under Carter, or Nixon, or Johnson, or Kennedy (a man whose fine reputation is due solely to his dying before the chickens came to roost). In fact, there has never been a true "turning point" in the Cold War, because the West has never done anything but lose.

This argument may seem unduly harsh or pessimistic at first, but we should consider one striking fact: not one country which has fallen to totalitarian rule since World War II has been freed. In two instances parts of countries—Iran and Austria—have been disgorged by the Soviets. A number of communist countries have broken away from the Soviets—most notably China. In no instance, however, has the totalitarian tide actually been turned back—the area under totalitarian rule has always increased, never decreased. The loss or gain of territory is not always the best indicator of the way a conflict is going, but in the end it is usually a conclusive one. It is true that the picture has not been all bad. The West has won some *defensive* victories and, during the two decades after World War II, the Western world, Japan and some of the more fortunate "backward" countries attained unprecedented degrees of freedom and prosperity. Aside from that one item of hope, the situation has steadily worsened. In its power position vis-à-vis the Soviets the West's strength peaked after World War II and declined slowly thereafter. The principal change from the 1945-1965 period is that the decline since then has accelerated. Truman and Eisenhower towered over their successors, and their policies were, relatively, far more effective. At least it can be said that they *had* policies. But it was only because their policies were ultimately ineffective that the West now faces such unprecedented dangers. Recognizing this may not be of much immediate help, but it is essential if we are to understand how we landed in the mess we are in.

Handlin's analysis of our domestic dilemmas is more interesting, but not well focused. Moreover, he treats many of these issues in a too narrowly American context, although they reflect problems common to most democratic Western countries. We are given a justly scathing treatment, but no real explanation, of the follies of the last two decades. Handlin slices through the obfuscation and nonsense surrounding the Indochina War in a particularly engaging and concise manner, demonstrating that the notion that the American people and Congress were "duped" into supporting the war is sheer fakery. He also recounts the snake-oil phraseology dispensed in the mid-60's by the "moderate" critics of the war—"negotiated settlement," "political solution," etc. He points out the strikingly similar characters of the three politicians who have most attracted liberals in our era: Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern and John Anderson—men with no executive experience, no responsibility for major legislation, no political savvy.

Too often, however, Handlin merely repeats conventional, albeit praiseworthy, sentiments and ideas. He notes that the positive features of American life are not treated in "the dominant forms of cultural expression" but offers no explanation of why this situation came about. Occasionally his ideas are neither original nor convincing. Discussing the "shift in tone" of American life, he complains of the change from "freedom to permissiveness," remarking that the "abandonment of old restraints has too often meant the abandonment of all restraints." He briefly suggests that this may be the result of our mobility and rootlessness. Yet Handlin is undoubtedly aware that Americans have always been exceptionally "rootless" and mobile.

Comments by Ronald Reagan, Edwin J. Feulner, William F. Buckley, Jr., Jacques Barzun, Milton Friedman, Russell Kirk, Willard C. Butcher, Philip M. Crane, Tom Wolfe and more . . .

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These qualities, whether good or bad, don't really explain our present discontents. To refine his analysis of these phenomena he should read the *Chronicles of Culture* editorials.

More importantly, our present social situation cannot accurately be described as one of permissiveness, despite the fondness of many conservatives for this superficial notion. It is true that many normal aspects of traditional social discipline are breaking down. Rising crime, rampant drug use, the arrogance and vulgarity of the mass media and entertainment industries, illegal strikes, public disorders, pornography, etc. would seem, at first, to justify the complaint about "permissiveness." But when one looks at other aspects of these things, and the people who defend or exemplify them, a different picture emerges. Our era is far from being a time of unfettered freedom or hedonism, and the exponents of "permissiveness" manifest not a joyous sense of freedom but a frantic compulsiveness, a dreadful conformity to antisocial, even suicidal ideas. Our era may be the first in which enslaving and poisoning oneself with heroin is "explained" as a result of "peer-group" pressure. The civil-liberty fanatics who have done their best to cripple law-enforcement agencies and to protect violence-prone extremists from Berkeley to Skokie, and who so zealously protect the "rights" of the creatures who produce child pornography, are notoriously prone to sympathizing with totalitarian regimes. Whatever the real motives of a man like William Kunstler are, an indulgent "permissiveness" is not one of them. Intellectuals and opinion-forming groups in particular, while lenient toward traditionally tabooed or forbidden behavior, are willing, even eager, to straitjacket their own and other people's conduct. It is a curious sort of permissiveness that constantly seeks to increase the areas of bureaucratic and judicial authority, and aims to tailor every area of life according to ideological notions. The disintegration of traditional standards is only one side of the coin; it draws the eye because it is bathed in a glaring, unpleasant light. The other, darker, side of the coin is a frantic effort to shackle and regiment humanity in ways far surpassing any of the traditional restraints that societies have evolved over the centuries—indeed, in ways even more extreme, in some cases, than those thus far used by totalitarian states. Professor Handlin, having a good opportunity to observe and comment with the skills of a distinguished historian, somehow missed his chance with this book. □

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

The Southern Ethos and the Rest of Us

"Literary traditionalists often complain that contemporary high-culture novels are boring because they lack a plot. Nonsense. *The Idiot* has less plot development per page than the majority of contemporary novels. Books are boring only when they lack meaning. After all, we are having experiences all the time. We turn to the writer to condense that experience for us and expose it in a meaningful way. But many contemporary writers seem to think that writing is simply a matter of listing experiences and events. . . . because they live in a culture which glorifies observations of fact but shuns judgments of value. Such a stance encourages both observation and wild speculation. But it discourages thought. Liberal culture is committed to the idea that the way to understand the world is to list all the facts. This is not only very inefficient, it is also painfully boring."

from "Boring Adolescence of Untalented Writers"
by Richard Vigilante

"One of the most distressing aspects of much popular modern literature is its tendency not only to chronicle but also to glorify the immature, the perverted, the obscene and the ignoble. In many contemporary works one rarely encounters the normal or the mature—much less the whole, the pure and the brave. Instead, one is often condemned to keep vicarious company with the spiritually blind, the emotionally halt and the psychically lame whom the reader is explicitly asked to admire and implicitly pressured to emulate. In this respect, the reading and writing of much current literature is an infectious activity in which the reader first contracts and then spreads the puerile indecisiveness and moral ennui that affects so many modern protagonists."

from "Eternal Infancy"
by Carson Daly

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Thomas Jefferson: Conservative

Dumas Malone: *The Sage of Monticello* (Volume Six of *Jefferson and His Time);* Little, Brown & Co.; Boston.

by Clyde Wilson

In 1809 Thomas Jefferson yielded up the Presidency and crossed into Virginia. In the 17 active years remaining to him he never left it. The first volume of Malone's masterpiece, published in 1948, was *Jefferson the Virginian.* The sixth and last is *The Sage of Monticello.* Jefferson begins and ends with Virginia. Keep this fact in mind. It will save us from many errors and lead us as near to the truth as we can get in regard to this sometimes enigmatic Founding Father.

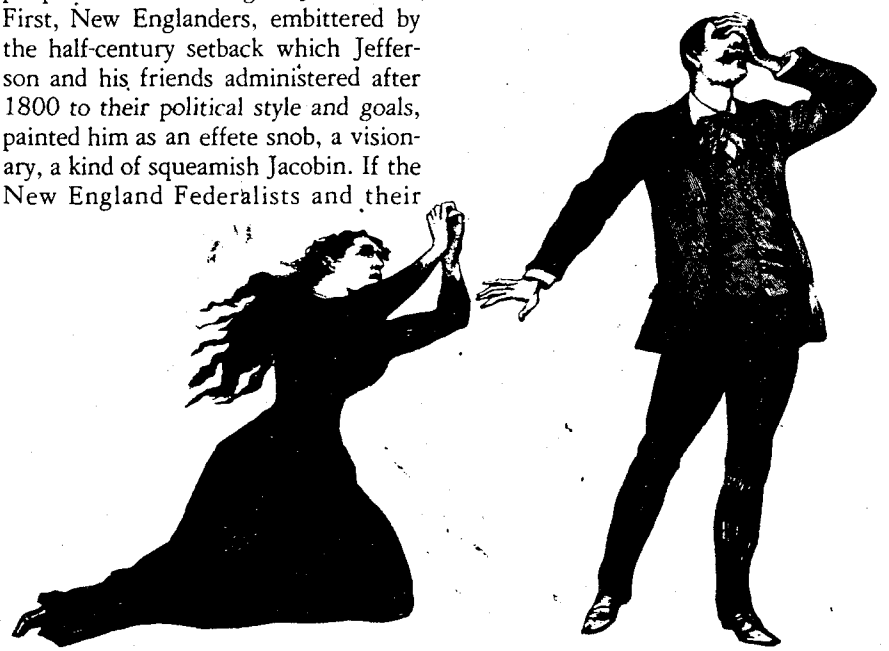
No great American, not even Lincoln, has been put to so many contradictory uses by later generations of enemies and apologists, and therefore none has undergone so much distortion. In fact, most of what has been asserted about Jefferson in the last hundred years—and even more of what has been implied or assumed about him—is so lacking in context and proportion as to be essentially false. What we commonly see is not Jefferson. It is a strange amalgam or composite in which the misconceptions of each succeeding generation have been combined and recombined until the original is no longer discernible.

Presuming we wish to know Jefferson rather than simply to manipulate his image for our own purposes, Malone is indispensable. *Jefferson and His Time* is a conspicuous example of an increasingly rare phenomenon, genuine scholarship. I mean that term as a compliment—to denote a work that avoids the extremes of pedantry and superficiality, that is exhaustive, thorough, honest, balanced, felicitous, reasonable and executed on a noble scale.

From Malone, and especially from the latest volume, we can, if we wish, begin to discern the real Jefferson. And that Jefferson is, in the broad outline of American history, identifiable in no other way than as a conservative. The real Jefferson is most visible in his last years. I do not mean by this that Jefferson was one of those proverbial persons who was liberal in youth and conservative in old age. There is no conflict between the young Jefferson and the old Jefferson except in the perceptions of image-manipulators. Jefferson was of a piece, his main themes were constant. But I do mean that the conservative Jefferson emerged most clearly in the last years, when he was not in office, when he was not bound by the necessary compromises of leading a party or speaking in the voice of community consensus rather than his own voice, when he was down home in his natural environment.

How did we get so far afield that it has taken half the lifetime of a great historian to recover the wherewithal of a proper understanding of Jefferson? First, New Englanders, embittered by the half-century setback which Jefferson and his friends administered after 1800 to their political style and goals, painted him as an effete snob, a visionary, a kind of squeamish Jacobin. If the New England Federalists and their descendants lacked political power, they made up for it in cultural power. Their loss at the polls was turned into a victory in the sophisticated battleground of historical writing. The understanding of Jefferson and his accomplishments that was handed down to posterity was created by Henry Adams. Adams, with brilliance, painstaking care and a cunningly contrived pseudo-objectivity, structured a perception of Jefferson and his times from which American historians—until Malone—had never really escaped. Jefferson, even when viewed sympathetically, was judged by New England standards. This meant that the essential outlines of his Virginian frame of reference were obliterated. Thus the mainsprings of his belief and action could not be detected accurately.

Jefferson's admirers have done him little better. It seemed that the Civil War and Federalist historians had repudiated and buried Jefferson forever. Then along came Vernon L. Parrington, the son of an English socialist (but raised in Kansas), who rediscovered



Dr. Wilson is professor of history at the University of South Carolina and associate editor of The Southern Partisan.

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Jefferson the agrarian liberal. But unfortunately what Parrington discovered was an imaginary combination of French philosophe and midwestern populist, not the planter of Albemarle County. Parrington, Claude Bowers and a host of other worthies soon turned Jefferson into the patron saint of Wilsonism, the New Deal and what currently passes for liberalism.

Thus, by a strange piling-up of ironies, the intellectual descendants of Jefferson's opponents converted him into one of them, a kind of urban, liberal, puritan dogmatist of egalitarianism. More recently, some of them, like Fawn Brodie, have discovered that the evidence does not fit this image, that Jefferson never was a certifiable modern liberal. They should have admitted that they had been wrong all along. Instead they chose to brand Jefferson as an aberration and a hypocrite for not being one of them, that is for not being what he never was and never wanted to be. Jefferson was an American republican, not a European social democrat. Jefferson was agrarian, not urban and industrial. Jefferson was a gentleman, which the class of admirers I am talking about here certainly is not.

All of these distorted notions of Jefferson have been possible only because of a lack of context, plausible because they have extrapolated one small portion of Jefferson and built an image on that foundation. This has been most conspicuous in the peculiar, dogmatic, ahistorical rendering of one phrase of the Declaration of Independence as a piece of egalitarian revelation. Indeed, without this one distortion of Jefferson (and of American history) the contemporary American left could hardly be seen to have any legitimate tradition at all. (Even more peculiarly, the same dogma is embraced as a main tenet by one school of "conservative" political scientists.)

There is one other important reason for misreading Jefferson that must be taken into account. Jefferson can be misunderstood in the same way that any great *writer* is subject to conflicting interpretations. And Jefferson is important as a writer, a thinker and a stylist. If he had never held public office, the immense body of his private correspondence would still be one of the most important American cultural legacies of his period. In his correspondence he was imaginative, playful, speculative. He adapted himself somewhat to the person he was addressing. He liked to turn ideas around and examine them from all angles. Except in his most narrowly political activities he wrote as a philosopher, not as a tactician. Further, he was intellectually polite and magnanimous. Dogmatists found that Jefferson did not contradict them in person. When they later discovered that he disagreed, they called him a hypocrite. He was not; he was simply a polite listener, a gentleman. Thus Jefferson can be quoted against Jefferson. In order to see clearly the real Jefferson we have to know the context, we have to know the whole corpus of work, we have to know which were the constant themes and which the occasional ones. This Malone has made possible.

Who, then, was the real Jefferson? What were these constant themes? They are clear. None offer comfort to the contemporary left. First of all, Jefferson stood for freedom and enlightenment. That he is our best symbol for these virtuous goals is Malone's central theme. That does not mean, however, that his thought can be twisted to support something that very different men with very different goals postulate to be freedom and enlightenment. His concepts of freedom and enlightenment were always rooted in the given nature and the necessities of his Virginia community and always balanced harmoniously against competing claims. Read Jefferson on the need for every citizen to be a soldier, on the prudential limits that should have been observed in the French Revolution, on the inappropriateness of liberty for a people unprepared for it; read of Jefferson's approval of Governor Patrick Henry's summary execution of a Tory marauder.

Jefferson favored the liberty of the individual and the community, and he had in mind certain reforms that he felt would enhance them. However, Jefferson was nothing if not the enemy of programmatic, government-imposed reforms. His whole career proved this. But read his reaction to the nationalistic program of our first "progressive" President, John Quincy Adams:

> When all government, domestic and foreign, in little as in great things, shall be drawn to Washington as the centre of all power, it will render powerless the checks provided of one government on another, and will become as venal and oppressive as the government from which we have separated.

Jefferson is on record as fearing the harmful effects of slavery on the community. But he feared far more the harmful effects of *political* antislavery. Read him on the Missouri controversy and you will correct a thousand misrepresentations. Jefferson, it is true, wanted America to be an example to all mankind of successful free government. But when he said example that is just what he

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meant, example. He gives no comfort to those who want to impose democracy on others, but much comfort to those who want to defend American democracy from any and all enemies. Jefferson, it is true, mistrusted the clergy. In this respect he was typical of his generation. But Jefferson the citizen, as opposed to Jefferson the philosopher, lived within the church. Religion and piety troubled him not at all. What he feared was the sanctimonious, intermeddling, politicized Calvinist clergy—that is, what we would today call "liberal" churchmen.

Jefferson was the advocate of a free economy, but he was not doctrinaire about it. Like all his values, his belief in the free market was balanced against other claims. He believed in economic freedom within a stable society. Malone's chapter, "The Political Economy of a Country Gentleman," by simple adherence to the facts, corrects four generations of distortion. When viewed "in retrospect," he writes, Jefferson's "reaction to the economic problems of his day can better be described as conservative."

Jefferson championed public education, but it was not public education on the leveling Prussian-New England model that later became the American standard. The traditional classical curriculum was to be supplemented by more modern and practical subjects, but not jettisoned to make room for them. It was to be an education competitive, elitist, based on a belief in a natural aristocracy of talents and virtues. The rich would always take care of themselves. The purpose of public education was to make sure that the talented ones who appeared among the poor would not be lost. That is the exact opposite of what modern American public education aims at, for its goal is to reduce the educational level to the lowest common denominator—which, in effect, guarantees that the poor but promising youth does not learn enough to rise above his station or to compete with the privileged. "The natural aristocracy," wrote Jefferson, "I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts and government of society. . . . May we not even say that the government is best which provides most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?"

Dumas Malone has completed a great work—a work that is, like its subject, truthful, harmonious, balanced, fair, decorous, gentlemanly. What a rare thing for an American book in the 20th century, a book by a gentleman about a gentleman. □

Conversing with Professor Barzun

Jacques Barzun: *Teacher in America;* Liberty Press; Indianapolis.

Jacques Barzun: *Three Talks;* Northern Kentucky University; Highland Heights, Kentucky.

by Gordon M. Pradl

Distinctions recognized force us to discriminate. Discriminations freely earned breed character, with its judgments. Character consistently demonstrated unveils wisdom. With wisdom a declining virtue these days, lost too in the end is this foundational chain. And at the heart of this great disappearing act is the erosion of our mythic imagination, which entails deciphering, compromising—but never extinguishing—the opposing contradictions of human existence that modern living seeks by denial to avoid.

A refreshing antidote to these depressing trends is the stylish voice of Jacques Barzun, distinguished teacher and administrator, whose career at Columbia University spanned almost half a century from 1927 to 1975. Here is a man of wisdom worthy to be wrestled with because he is one who has seen what fruits can be borne from a well-placed distinction. The timely reissuing of *Teacher in America,* originally published in 1945, and the printing by Northern Kentucky University of *Three Talks* afford us the opportunity to re-emphasize the kinds of oppositional insights across the whole spectrum of social life that Professor Barzun has been providing us with for several generations now, despite our perverse display of deafness.

Dr. Pradl is professor of English education at New York University.

Among the many distinctions Professor Barzun offers, two reveal the kind of principled judgments that tie together a lifetime of observations on the educational and cultural scene. In the first instance is the distinction between communication and conversation. Of equal importance is the second distinction between a problem and a difficulty. In each case we see his commitment to the dynamic as opposed to the static view of human affairs and interaction. And it is because Professor Barzun's scrutiny of social arrangements is traceable to rationally held principles that his message passes beyond his own time.

The literacy issue and Barzun's good sense regarding the nature of reading and writing is what informs the wisdom of *Teacher in America.* In the first place, our current cultural malaise is tied to "the inherent weakness of all modern literacy." Such literacy "is half-baked and arrogant. It trifles solemnly with the externals of things, neglecting even the surfaces or the handles by which a truth may be seized: it goes like a child for the false glint or striking triviality of detail." The schools, of course, contribute to the debasement of artistic response—a state of affairs upon which all the subversive atrocities of pop culture are based—when they separate

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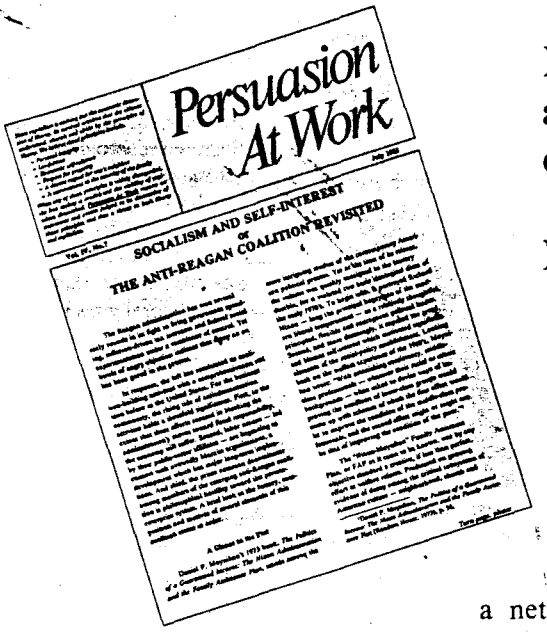

Most Businessmen Have a Fairly Accurate Reading of Their Competition.

How About Their Opposition?

The magazines and activist groups which mold and manipulate public opinion toward anticapitalist goals are now big business. Their impact in recent years has grown more potent through a network of multinational support groups. The last election has given this activity a vibrant new impetus, with funds and memberships on the increase. There is now a much greater readiness to form coalitions among groups whose goals previously had seemed remote from one another.

It is clear that the conflict between the interests of the business community and these anticapitalist forces is going to become more intense during the eighties.

Persuasion At Work is a newsletter specifically designed to keep the businessman apprised of the important developments in this opinion-making contest. Each month we offer an analysis of a publication, an organization or a movement pushing public attitudes one way or the other on an issue of importance to the business community.

These commentaries are drawn from direct sources including attendance at the meetings of activist groups, study of their promotional literature and monitoring of their periodicals.

In this era when "corporate responsibility" has become a bludgeon used by activist groups to force corporations to meet their demands, a new level of understanding is needed by the businessman to hold his own in a kind of contest for which he has had little preparation.

Persuasion At Work is a sentinel resource to help guard a poorly protected flank.

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learning from experience. And as Barzun emphasizes, language, especially, the mother tongue, more than any other subject, "must be learned close to its living source." Indeed the principle of proximity is so crucial for Barzun that despite its excesses he clearly recognizes the value of progressive education in this country: ". . . if it has done nothing else, it should be honored and given thanks for insisting on genuine, hand-to-hand teaching, as against the giving out of predigested hokum."

At the center of the kind of literacy which Professor Barzun has spent a lifetime serving is the classic, but it is the classic viewed as the repository of a living conversation, not a dead text waiting to be dissected. The classic, he reminds us, provides "examples of how to think, not of what to think." In this sense Barzun strikes the ethical note that should permeate education if it is not to degenerate into mere instruction.

> It happens to be a fact that all classical works without exception deal directly or indirectly with problems of conduct. That is their great virtue for school use. Not that they teach a plain goody-goody morality, but that they show and discuss and solve dilemmas that a shipping clerk or an athlete can be made to understand. For this understanding, the discussion of any classic *must be superficial.* If you dive below the surface with your pupil you drown him. Certain teachers are always terrified of superficiality; they seem to think other teachers will scoff or that the dead author will scold. Let them remind themselves that their colleagues' profundity would strike the great author as either surface scratching or pedantry; and let them remember that for every reader this is a time when a given book is being read for the first time.

The goal of such teaching is to have the student make the work his own and in so doing instill within him a lifetime habit of responsive reading, something which the "skills" approaches to reading (and the other disciplines) short-circuit, because they never discover and take into account the meaning intentions of the student. Basic Skills or Functional Literacy programs, then, end by being counterproductive since their strategies of fragmentation and their sterile reading materials ("Textbooks have no authors, just as it might be said that they have no readers.") fail to engage the deeper humanity of the reader/learner. The loss, both personal and social, should sober us quickly: a citizenry mired in its own narrow confines, never to be inspired in the ways Professor Barzun so richly characterizes in his stirring defense of the humanities. His words indeed bear frequent repeating:

> The study of the arts in their great manifestations is thus a gradual and deliberate accustoming of the feelings to strong sensations and precise ideas. It is a breaking down of self-will for the sake of finding out what life and its objects may really be like. And this means that most esthetic matters turn out to be moral ones in the end. Great art offers a choice—that of preferring strength to weakness, truth to softness, life to lotus-eating.

Or again:

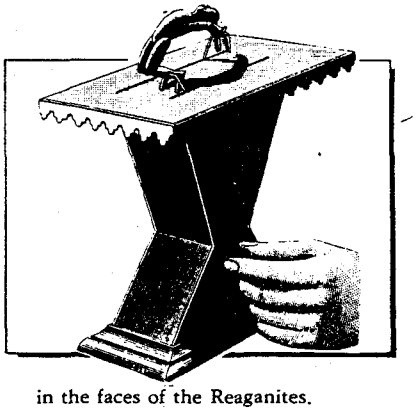
> Now the reason why art is worth teaching at all is that it gives men the best sense of how rich, how diverse, how miraculous are the expressions of the human spirit through the ages. The communicative power of

LIBERAL CULTURE

You've Been Had, Mr. Cagney

James Cagney, a Hollywood icon who, for over half a century, embodied on screen the archetypal tenet of Americanism—that man can err and remain good at the core—considered himself indebted to the spirit of this country. For almost two decades he lived in retirement, occasionally voicing his disapproval of the direction the post-Cagneyesque American was traveling. His critical comments, when and if they reached the press, had an unmistakably nonliberal sound. He seemed to believe in principles which were not very much *en vogue* with the American culture of the 1960's and 70's. Recently he accepted a part in a movie entitled *Ragtime,* made from a novel with an outspoken leftist slant. By thrusting Cagney back into the spotlight, the producers and the director of the film assured themselves both prestige and money. Writing about the cinematic version of the movie, *Village Voice* praised its director with these words:

> At the very least, he has now managed to wave *Ragtime* like a red flag



in the faces of the Reaganites.

Village Voice should know: it's the organ of cynical, best-selling anti-Americanism and well-heeled, smart liberationism. It's always on the side of "the people," who are either deviate or San Salvadorean guerrillas. We do not think that Mr. Cagney, as we know him, would be very taken with those "people," their "Village" or their "Voice," the films and directors they promote and extol. We are left with the uncomfortable impression that Mr. Cagney would have done better to read the script a little more carefully and with a more critical eye. □

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> artistic forms that are utterly unlike, and perhaps at first repellent to the beholder, shatters the provincial assumptions which nearly all of us inherit—namely, that our ways of speaking, singing, and feeling are the only really human ways, all others being outlandish and probably meaningless.

In light of such vital connections, every teacher of literacy needs to be viewed as a teacher of the humanities, and all teachers of English and the arts need regularly to recite the words of L. C. Knights, the British Shakespearean scholar: "We must remind ourselves that we are not specialists, but simply people who have more time and more opportunity to study what belongs to everyone."

When it comes to writing, Professor Barzun acknowledges its centrality both to learning and to the mark of an educated citizen.

> Writing comes before reading, in logic and also in the public mind. No one cares whether you read fast or slow, well or ill, but as soon as you put pen to paper, somebody may be puzzled, angry, bored, or ecstatic; and if the occasion permits, your reader is almost sure to exclaim about the schools not doing their duty.

The schools have failed miserably in the area of writing for two simple reasons: frequency and proximity. First, recent studies have shown that the schools are requiring almost no writing of our children, and what writing does go on, sadly enough, is all too frequently of a copying sort. Second, writing has never been integrated with a view of the student as an active and controlling learner—a view which is needed if schooling is ever to be turned back into education.

> A child should select a topic that truly engages his interest. To eliminate pretense he must be helped to do this by means of questions and suggestions. At any age, it is very reassuring to be told that you don't really want to write about the Tariff. After two or three casts a real subject emerges, satisfactory to both parties.

And further, as Barzun notes, writing in the school must involve a collaborative effort:

> . . . the important fact is that writing cannot be taught exclusively in a course called English Composition.

> Writing can only be taught by the united efforts of the entire teaching staff. This holds good of any school, college, or university. Joint effort is needed, not merely to "enforce the rules"; it is needed to ensure accuracy in every subject.

As must now be clear, since I have been allowing Professor Barzun's words to speak for themselves as much as possible, the principle of proximity should permeate the entire curriculum, and accordingly he addresses every area—from mathematics and music to science and social studies. Such a stance returns us to his original distinction between communication and conversation, which is founded finally on a philosophy of social organization: democracy as opposed to the range of totalitarian tyrannies, from the right to the left, that unfortunately have been the continual scourge of mankind. Democracy, however, is a fragile enterprise requiring an active and reactive citizenry which, in turn, only develops when men and women learn to interact with the sources of information, whether it be teacher or government spokesman. The perfect model for democracy is true dialectical conversation, not unidirectional communication.

> . . . conversation is a school for thinkers and should be a school for democrats. When one finds supposedly educated people arguing heatedly over matters of fact and shying away from matters of opinion; when one sees one's hosts getting nervous at a difference of views regarding politics or the latest play; when one is formally entertained with information, games or queries cut out of the paper about the number of geese in a gaggle; when the dictionary and the encyclopedia are regarded as final arbiters of judgment and not as fallible repositories of fact; when intelligent youth is advised not to go against the accepted belief in any circle because it will startle, shock, and offend—it is time to recognize, first, that the temper of democratic culture is tested at every dinner table and in every living room—just as much as at school, in the pulpit, or on the platform; and second, that by this test and despite our boasted freedom of opinion, we lack men and women whose minds have learned to move easily and fearlessly in the perilous jungle of ideas.

Conversation properly conceived has no end because it never presumes to judge its results in advance. It thus is compatible and consistent with Barzun's other key distinction. In *Three Talks* he opposes difficulties with problems in a pointed passage on the downward spiral of our national traits.

> . . . we have become incurable futurists. The present is not good enough for those who expect so much of innovation. Tomorrow is bound to see our problems solved, all our desires fulfilled. This euphoria in the midst of despair is not a genuine surge of power. It is a deficiency of the practical imagination, coupled with the giving up of responsibility and the vacuum of private judgment

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. . . . It is the utopian outlook and quite as obscurantist as its former opposite. Even apart from the bandwagon effect and the regrets and remorse after the defeat of foolish expectations, it has the grave defect of making one impatient with Difficulty. By difficulty, I mean the permanent obstacles to the good life and the good society. Few of them are problems in the sense in which we bandy the word around. Problems are solved and thereby removed. Difficulties remain and must be worked at forever. In a civilization rightly aware of itself, the majority are willing to furnish that work. In ours, the quest for innovative solutions, admirable in certain domains, distracts and disturbs and even destroys.

When our society totally develops a problem-solving mentality, it is ripe for communication, ripe for exploitation that would have us confuse novelty for art (a topic which Barzun explores in depth in his wise *The Uses and Abuses of Art).* Difficulty and conversation require a slower pace, one that is more in touch with the natural capacities of the human sensorium. And yet the machine runs at a faster and faster speed.

> What makes the world oppressive? In one word, it is overstimulation. The demands upon our attention to trivial things that may prove fatal if not attended to are great in themselves. We are surrounded by dangerous engines that care nothing for our skin. And this familiar response to material stimulus spreads to every other kind, while the new means at our disposal multiply the effects by multiplying our contacts. The telephone, television, rapid transportation make for too many encounters, too many demands. Space and time are too full. . . . This hammering helps to explain why we fear and resent the sharp edges of things and wrap cushions of false words around them. They protect us at least in our dealings with other people, of whom there are too many with a claim on our thoughts. Overstimulation also accounts for the rush toward the cults and cures based on deep breathing and vacated minds. The very name Transcendental Meditation is bound to be soothing to a population that has never known the privilege of meditating here and now, in the midst of life.

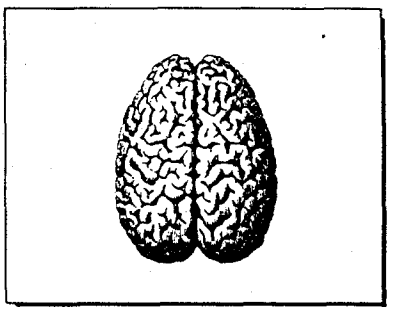
This overstimulation, this explosion of information and contacts, threatens to make a sham of our democracy because the managerial set begins to predominate and freedom is diminished accordingly. Professor Barzun rightly has no solutions, but his spirited pointing to our ongoing difficulties reaffirms the potency of our mythic imagination:

> The chief of our present difficulties — one that will never go away — is how to redirect our minds to concrete experience, give up the sleazy words and the sleazy behavior they inspire, and so bend our energies once again to the endless task of mending the cracks, of building and rebuilding the fabric of civilization.

But the question remains, where will the conversing public needed to complete Professor Barzun's live circuit come from, if we keep bludgeoning people with new and more glamorous stimulation while failing to lay the necessary foundations of literacy in the schools, a literacy that is needed to define what passes for life in the community at large. What hope there is, of course, will come from citizens who learn to begin with the proper distinctions, who keep the resulting oppositional tendencies clearly in mind, whatever course of action is pursued. And Professor Barzun's words will always be there to inspire, to begin the conversation of democracy anew. □

LIBERAL CULTURE

The Last Refuge of Idiots



We received a call the other day from a frustrated European, who thought he had escaped political insanity by coming to New York City, only to stumble upon a book by a best-selling psychobiographer named Fawn Brodie. The book is entitled *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character,* and its methodology rests on the principle of explaining the former President's id by analyzing the colloquialisms he—like any other American—has used countless times every day. The authoress concludes, for example, that whenever Mr. Nixon used the verb "to kick," he thereby powerfully and irrevocably proved his own villainy and blackhearted ego. "My God!" our friend moaned on the telephone, "The book reads like the ravings of an imbecile. And it is a Book of the Month Club selection. I'm trying to get away from European morons who want to ruin NATO, and I run into this madness. And you Americans pretend to the leadership of the West. You, who once saved us from tyranny and malnutrition, and still promise to protect us from communist barbarism . . ."

We made an effort to assuage his despondence by affirming that we too consider psychobiographers *au pair* with the mentally retarded. But we couldn't explain to him why New York publishers promote both psychobiography and idiocy, perhaps because we were a bit ashamed that the rascality of those publishers is so royally rewarded by the booming revenue from psychobiographic best sellers. Whatever we said, it didn't sound too convincing. □

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Roman Noir in Fiction and Life

Richard Layman: *Shadow Man, The Life of Dashiell Hammett;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.

by Keith Bower

By one definition, the life of Dashiell Hammett could be said to have been a rousing success: any man who lives to the age of 67 and leaves owing the IRS $163,286.46 plus interest need not worry about not having had some impact on the world. Hammett is chiefly credited with developing the "hard-boiled dick" genre of detective fiction, and the immortalizations of Sam Spade by Humphrey Bogart and Nick Charles by William Powell safely assure that American culture will long remember Hammett.

But the sense of failure and frustration imparted in Richard Layman's literary biography of "D. H." leads asphyxiatingly to the conclusion that it might have been better for Hammett if one of his hellish drinking frenzies had ended his story in 1933, when the last complete work of his writing career, *The Thin Man,* was published. Perhaps then Lillian Hellman, his lover and author-companion, might not have contributed to Broadway her *The Children's Hour,* but those are the things you have to sacrifice when contemplating euthanasia. Hellman's own blurry and vague reminiscences of Hammett's long decline after 1935 cloy with an irritating pathos that only a stoic from the "pity and irony" school of American letters could master. She once called him a "Dostoevsky sinner-saint," and both Layman's and Hellman's accounts of Hammett's life continually veer between those two extremes.

The real personality of Dashiell Hammett inevitably remains a mystery. As flamboyant as he was during his glory days in Hollywood and New York, Hammett left an aura of privacy as impenetrable as Sam Spade's home phone number. The disappointment of Layman's biography is that scarcely anything of importance about this man's life emerges from the investigation.

In *Everybody's Autobiography* Gertrude Stein tells of bending Hammett's ear at a Los Angeles cocktail party in 1935. She was contrasting heroism as treated by 19th- and 20th-century writers. Hammett agreed with her assertion that 20th-century authors wrote chiefly about themselves and then added something that reveals part of the reason for the shroud of mystery around his personality: "He said twentieth-century men lack the self-confidence of men in the nineteenth century, and therefore they had to exaggerate their own qualities."

There are many vignettes of Hammett corroborating his exaggerated self-confidence: drunken Hammett emasculating Nathaniel West in front of a gold-digger at a cocktail party; tubercular Hammett fending off a rowdy Ernest Hemingway with the suggestion that he stick to bullying Scott Fitzgerald; young Hammett telling his boss at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad that he couldn't promise to make it to work on time and being rehired for his manly honesty.

Yet Layman does nothing with these incidents except to collect them for future investigators who may be willing to wrestle with the Hammett mystique. Perhaps he is wise and knows, after having shadowed Hammett through the course of this book, that there is not enough of a payoff at the end of such a chase to warrant more than the scattered, literal account presented here. Hammett's own Continental Op probably would have dropped the case for lack of sustaining collateral necessary to cover the costs of the investigation.

Still, it would be interesting if some English doctoral candidate would find out why so many of the murders in Hammett's novels are family matters. The majority of murders *are* domestic in nature, but Hammett's murders are not commonly motivated. In *Red Harvest,* Hammett's first detective novel after literally hundreds of short stories, Elihu Wilson's son is unwittingly killed by the jealous suitor of the old man's mistress. Senator Henry kills his son in *The Glass Key* to prevent him from harming the local mob boss, who is expected to facilitate the Senator's next election. Guttman in *The Maltese Falcon* is killed by his gunsel, Wilmer, whom he loves "like a son," after having callously left the henchman as a sop to the police. *The Dain Curse* has Owen Fitzstephan mastermind the murder of a dozen or so people, including his cousin/lover and her husband, in order to possess their daughter (his first cousin once removed).

Hammett's dark, convoluted stories offer an early warning of the breakdown of conventional Western values. Writing about the transvestitism, homosexuality and flippant promiscuity in some of Ham-

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mett's works, Layman says, "More often, sexuality in Hammett's work is distorted or perverted and represents the extent to which a character has departed from a romantic ideal of man's capacity for uncorrupted love." Hammett's personal life was an anthem to corrupted love, which Layman explains by noting the long line of cads in Hammett's family. Where do we find a restorative concern for romantic ideals in Hammett's life?

The rampant insensitivity toward human life played out in these stories was dictated by the readership of *Black Mask* and the other pulps by which Hammett gained his reputation. He could have excelled in the art of "pure detection," as Jacques Barzun refers to the classical school of mystery writing: Poe, Conan Doyle, Sayers, Knox, Chesterton, E. C. Bentley, S. S. Van Dine, A. A. Milne, etc. He knew criminology and was a wizard at constructing fast-paced plots full of unexpected, believable twists. Had he been a romantic this would have seemed the natural direction for Hammett's talents. But, as Raymond Chandler wrote, "Even Einstein couldn't get very far if three hundred treatises of the higher physics were published every year, and several thousand others in some form or other were hanging around in excellent condition, and being read too."

When Hammett got involved in writing detective fiction it was because he wanted to set the facts straight—that shell casings are not left around after firing a revolver; that you don't feel the blow that strikes you unconscious; that identifiable fingerprints are seldom left on anybody's skin. His experience as a Pinkerton detective lent plausibility to the genre, and his ear for dialect was amazing. Even Hemingway's curt dialogues are dated compared to Hammett's. He taught a generation of writers to see things point-blank.

Another factor in his involvement with pulp fiction was the fact that Hammett, while recuperating from tuberculosis after World War I, married the nurse about whom Hemingway romanticized, and he needed a way to support her and the daughter who was born three months after the wedding. While Lillian Hellman refers to Hammett's sense of honor ("Have you always kept your word?" "Most of the time," he said, "maybe because I've so seldom given it"), nothing is said by either her or Layman to justify Hammett's abandonment of Jose and her two daughters after his fan mail started pouring in. Their marriage was never legitimately dissolved, although a mail-order Mexican divorce seemed to satisfy what little sense of propriety he had about marital contracts.

The confusion of Hammett's personal life, the exigencies of the marketplace of American publishing and the thirst of the public in the 20's and 30's for mayhem, sex and realism—these things made Hammett a successful writer. And this success, combined with alcoholism and a penchant for giving his money to anyone who might enjoy it more than he would, led to an early retirement. After writing the last third of *The Glass Key* in a locked room, sans bottle, in thirty hours, Hammett declared himself finished as a writer. His career as a Hollywood screen writer, with its missed deadlines and Hammett's general irresponsibility, was a tribute to the patience of his producers.

The Hammett legacy has been making a comeback lately. More than anyone else, Hammett inspired the sort of cynicism and alienation that generated the *film noir* after World War II. At that time Hammett was out of Hollywood, involving himself in communist affiliations about which he would later remain loyally silent before Congressional hearings. The cinema after the war had turned away from the levity of a decade earlier, when Nick and Nora and their pet dog Asta tippled their way through life's upper stratum. Such movies as those made from James M. Cain's novels, *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* and Hemingway's *The Killers* brought Americans home to the realism Hammett had intimated. Check John Huston's 1943 classic, *The Maltese Falcon,* against any of these bleak manifestations of postwar angst. It is not hard to envision a hand of demoralizing conspiracy at work, real or merely exuded from the collective consciousness of Screen Writers Guild types.

The public was not as eager to have movies portray a depraved, animalistic mankind as the movie-makers thought. For several years now the McCarthy era has been trotted out to refresh our memories and instruct the young about what a dismal race of imbeciles the Cold Warriors were. But Hollywood learned a valuable lesson from it all: people like happy endings, and when you keep driving at them with gloom and guilt they retaliate, most often by watching television. Hollywood learned that it is part of a larger structure known as southern California, which, in turn, is situated in the southwestern corner of a country called the United States.

Now we see a renaissance in motion pictures. Traditional action thrillers like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Superman,* and slurpy romances like *Continental Divide,* are competing with remakes of late-40's bruisers like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Body Heat.* It is difficult now to think of Hollywood locked up in the gruesome, one-theme half nelson applied after the war by a group of writers with Soviet sympathies. The movement back to the *film noir* seems to suggest an urge to delve into the violence of human psychology once again. The box office will tell us if there is a similarly inclined public for this trend. People are not in the habit of going to the movies frequently, as they were before television, and we can little appreciate the danger felt by some after the war when the drugged masses were being brutalized by black, hopeless pictures that made Hobbes look like Norman Vincent Peale.

The McCarthy era had a beneficial effect on Dashiell Hammett also. For the last fifteen years of his life he was on the skids. Flaccid attempts at starting a literary masterpiece degenerated into

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mere silence. He kept typewriters around the place just to remind himself that he had been a writer. Except for the handmaiden work he did on Hellman's plays and the occasional course on fiction writing at the Marxist Jefferson School of Social Science, Dashiell Hammett was a classic burnout. But he was still a Marxist. Hammett never effused the sort of Soviet communism his mistress Lillian Hellman had, but that does not mean he did not have that pride of ideology which makes a man sign all sorts of foolish Soviet-inspired petitions when they are thrust under his nose. After his having raved for the Right Way of Life through most of that time when he was throwing $1000-a-night flings, his bill came due. The McCarthy Committee subpoenaed Hammett to testify about his connection with the bail-bond fund for the Civil Rights Congress (which had lobbied to put the Communist Party on the New York ballot in 1946). Dashiell Hammett was on the map again.

It will never be known whether D. H. was really a card-carrying communist. I tend to think not, trusting that he was honest in telling his brother that he was merely a Marxist. He was idiosyncratically attached to the spirit of individualism and could hardly have cared less for economic theory. Any man who could invent Samuel Spade, however tired he was of capitalism, would never leave justice up to a Central Committee. Hammett favored Marx out of the sentiment that such a system accorded with the more pleasant, neighborly drives of his ego. This is as close as Hammett, a lapsed Catholic, could have gotten to religion. The fact that political systems should take into account more than the ideological content, the obsessional wish, of the systematizer was of no interest to him. He was one of those people who become cynical after having their romantic instincts blunted at an early age.

An instinct for chivalry and uprightness exists substantially in his Continental Op and other "hard-boiled" types. They are not womanizers like their progenitor. They remain aloof and still manage to help their fellow man more than the intellectuals, institutions and incorporations around them. They are men of action.

As Hammett's typewriters collected dust, his dream came true. He got a chance to be one of his heroes. Whether Hammett, as a Pinkerton agent, ever really did anything more significant than pad after suspected embezzlers is dubious, but in the Case of the Slimy Senator, Hammett found his glory, his way to martyrdom. It was pathetic that Hammett should be dragged before the tribunal, a destitute, spent man. He let himself be mauled with the same masochistic zeal Ned Beaumont showed during the torture scene in *The Glass Key*. He took his jail sentence calmly and said it was like going home again. Once he had quipped to Howard Fast, who was on his way to the slammer, "It will be easier for you, Howard, if you first take off the crown of thorns." On the whole, Hammett was happy to have a chance to prove himself, to show his colleagues that after all the years he could still display dignity and guts. Even his jailers called him "sir." He bragged about cleaning the toilets at the prison better than they had ever been done before. As martyrdoms go, it was not too bad, but his health broke toward the end.

Only at this stage of his biography do I see Dashiell Hammett pellucidly. Coriolanus once said: "Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death, vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger but with a grain a day, I would not buy their mercy at the price of a word . . ." And so, before the Committee and by the grace of the Fifth Amendment, Dashiell Hammett became far more significant than anything he might have written. He was a romantic after all.

This much can be said about Hammett: he was not the kind of celebrity who would have consented to appear in the pages of *People* magazine. He had too much class for that. □

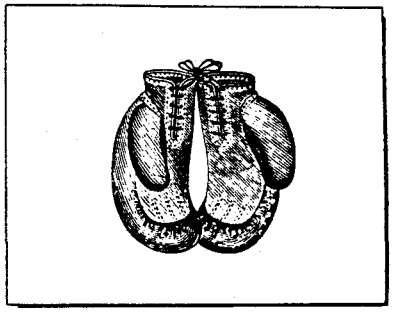
LIBERAL CULTURE

Mutuality

In the *New York Review of Books*, Ms. Frances FitzGerald, the highbred dyspeptic distorter of truths who prevaricated about Vietnam with such upper-class grace, now elaborates on an all-too-familiar theme under the title "The Triumphs of the New Right":

> Just after the 1980 election the ABC show called 'Nightline' put the satellite technology of television to work to create an extraordinary electronic encounter between Senator George McGovern, Senator Frank Church, Senator Birch Bayh, Jerry Falwell, and Paul Weyrich. The three just-defeated senators had never met their opponents before, and the two sides knew so little about each other that both were disarmed.

Correction please: the three defeated Senators knew nothing about Falwell and Weyrich—their liberal ignorance and arrogance would scarcely allow them to descend so low as to be interested in any socio-ideological perspectives other than their own. That's why they were defeated. But Falwell and Weyrich knew *everything* about all the McGoverns, Churches and Bayhs of the country. That's how they were able to defeat them. □



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The Forgotten Charms of Hypocrisy

Lisa Alther: *Original Sins;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Becki Klute

It would be difficult to imagine a better time to be a child than during the 1950's. The view from a small town was that of a placid, cheerful country. Children could wander at will without fear of molestation, doors were seldom locked, neighbors chatted languidly on front porches. There were county fairs, July 4th celebrations and ice-cream socials. Those of us born in the first years of the baby boom reaped whatever benefits our parents had culled from the horrors of war and Depression. From their determination to make the world a better place we received a near-idyllic existence—on the surface at least. It is the darker, more murky depths beneath that placid surface that Lisa Alther purports to examine. She sets her tale in a small town in Tennessee, but it could have been any small town anywhere—Michigan, Iowa, Ohio, even her adopted Vermont.

Ms. Alther follows five children—two sisters, two brothers and one black boy—through the somnolent 50's and into the turbulent 60's, through the innocent illusions of childhood into the conflicts and heartaches of adolescence and on to what Alther sees as the expected adulthood of each. We have Raymond and Jed, stamp collector and jock respectively; Emily and Sally, "brain" and brainless cheerleader; and Donny, who seems all but unaware that his skin color differs from that of his friends. These are not characters, though, they are stereotypes. Their sole function is to allow Ms. Alther to express her contempt and/or admiration for that which each symbolizes. She seems especially to despise Jed and Sally, who marry and attempt to live out their lives in their home town, for better or worse. Raymond and Emily, who fulfill their childhood dream of going to New York City, come in for their share of misery too, but Ms. Alther has decided to approve of their respective lifestyles. Raymond is a borderline bisexual and back-to-nature freak living alone in a backwoods cabin, and Emily is a lesbian flitting from one "relationship" to another. Donny, Ms. Alther notes approvingly, also winds up in Gotham and becomes a black militant.

Mrs. Klute is on the editorial staff of the Chronicles.

"*Original Sins* is an old-fashioned novel in the best sense of the term . . . [Alther] gives generously, both to her readers and to the children of her imagination."

—*Time*

I attended a small-town high-school class reunion recently, and I tried to find someone, anyone, who might bear out Lisa Alther's perception of life. I found a woman who was president of something called a Scrabble Club, a former class goof-off who seemed very comfortable with his MBA, a woman who claimed to be writing songs for Johnny Cash; a banjo player in a country band. There were workaholics and, no doubt, a few alcoholics, broken marriages and odd careers among both the "locals" and those who had arrived from far-flung cities. I searched in vain for anyone even faintly resembling one of the characters of *Original Sins*. Perhaps militants and lesbians don't go to class reunions.

In truth, *Original Sins* is not a novel, it's a rather petty, and pettish, diatribe. Ms. Alther's point seems to be that we were all conned, back in the 50's, into thinking that life was good, or, worse yet, nice. She's stuck in a late-60's mentality combined with a feminist mindset that blames all problems on social arrangements which are grounded in traditional values. She takes disjointed pot shots at everything from McCarthy to Catholicism to feminine domesticity to high-school proms. What seems to upset Ms. Alther most is the system of customs and morals which was operant during the 50's and early 60's. That social design depended, to a large extent, on a mechanism of essentially benevolent hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is currently on some list of most-despised nouns, and to combine it with the adjective "benevolent" would, at first, seem ludicrous. But a certain service has been rendered to society, to civilized living, by the careful, if unwritten, practice of hypocrisy. It's a rather convoluted concept, difficult to explain. It has existed for centuries as a feeling, a way of living, which was simply understood but seldom mentioned, so much a part of life's very fabric that it went almost unnoticed. What it did was to make life more pleasant. Miseries in individual lives were denied, at least in public, which somehow made them easier to bear. The man who cheated on his wife sat with her in church on Sunday, and if it didn't alter their problems, at least she didn't have to bear her shame in public. Cheerful smiles were the order of the day.

Those cheerful smiles gave way, during the 60's, to fanatical grimaces and disagreeable scowls. Hypocrisy was out and "let it all hang out" was in. What people found was that such a change did not appreciably improve their lives. The dubious privilege of doing one's own thing was tempered by the necessity of watching, and sometimes enduring, others doing their own often disgusting, even violent, things. Rather than a friendly, if hypocritical, smile from a stranger on a bus, one was just as likely to have to watch him pick his nose or fondle his girlfriend, or, in some neighborhoods, his boyfriend. Stripped of the restrictions imposed by that sys-

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tem of benevolent hypocrisy—most often referred to as good manners—what did we have left? We found crudeness, boorishness and, in too many instances, violence and savagery. That Ms. Alther thoroughly approves of this shift is best illustrated in the contrast between the militant Donny and his long-suffering Aunt Jemima-ish grandmother, who, like all the characters, are crude stereotypes.

Fortunately we, that is American society, seem to be slowly emerging from the quagmire of the 60's and 70's. Lisa Alther, so highly touted by the sophisticates in the literary press for her assorted condemnations and exposures, is beginning to look a trifle dated. It takes the Manhattan cognoscenti a while to catch up to the rest of the country, of course, but one hopes that by the middle of the 80's they will have caught the direction of the drift. Then will come the mad scramble to catch up, and perhaps there will be a few novels which attempt to show how traditional certitudes can make life nice. □

Beyond Nature: Sexual Aesthetics and Politics

Marilyn French: *Shakespeare's Division of Experience;* Summit Books; New York.

William Leach: *True Love and Perfect Union;* Basic Books; New York.

by Robert B. Eckhardt

At the outset of this essay I offer all due apologies to Gilbert Keith Chesterton, whose key paragraph in "The Ethics of Elfland" (from Orthodoxy, *1908) I have paraphrased here. In this case, the limitation is sincerely meant to be a form of homage; while I cannot in conscience share all of Chesterton's views, he stands as one of this century's most energetic and versatile writers in the English language.*

There are certain viewpoints or explications (cases of one set of phrases following another) which are, in the true sense of the word, preferences. Such are certain philosophical positions or literary tastes. We in science (who are the most imaginative of all creatures) accept those interpretations and preferences. For instance, if the Prince considers Cinderella to be more beautiful than her sisters, then it is *necessary* that he believes the ugly sisters to be . . . uglier . . . than Cinderella. There is no getting out of it. A Hegelian may talk as much fatalism about that fact as he pleases: it really must be. If as a boy Darwin roamed the fields rather than studying in classrooms, then young Charles preferred bright beetles to dull lessons. The warmth of a boyish collector's passions decreed it from an inscrutable heart, and we in science submit. If a lad tracks a beetle, then he learns firsthand whether two legs in pursuit are swifter than six legs in flight: that is an experience grown out of preference, and science is full of it. But as I peeked over the disciplinary hedge into the world of letters, I observed an extraordinary thing. I observed that learned authors at their typewriters were writing about the actual facts of biology—human anatomy, physiology, evolution and so on—as if these were matters of choice and preference. They talked as if the idea that the brain led the way in human evolution were as reasonable as the knowledge that our ancestors of four million years ago walked about on their hind legs. But it is not. There is an enormous difference by the test of science, which is the test of evidence. You cannot show physical evidence to document the belief that the earliest humans had brains more powerful than those other animals, but you can easily observe that they walked on just two feet at a time when their brains were no larger than those of chimpanzees. These authors in front of their keyboards write of a scientist named Thomas Henry Huxley, who is supposed to have used arguments about evolution to lend support to feminist positions. But they apparently failed to read, or, reading, failed to believe, the same Huxley's statements about girls being not so well balanced as boys, their being naturally timid and born conservatives. If Huxley truly held these views, then that was his opinion. That is truly subjective, for it is difficult to conceive the extent of evidence needed to support such sweeping judgments. But we can easily conceive other statements of opinion, ones which might be better supported by factual evidence; we can document physical and physiological differences on the average between the sexes which are not mere matters of opinion. We must always in science keep this sharp distinction between evidence, which can really be observed, and matters of taste, in which there is no test of experience, but only subjective judgments. We believe in freedom of opinion, but only where subjective preferences do not contradict objective evidence. We believe that much of the evolution of our species took place in the absence of firsthand observations; but that does not at all confuse our convictions about

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". . . she is quite dazzling. Her reading of 'Hamlet' . . . seems to me brilliant and far more coherent than Ernest Jones's or T. S. Eliot's."
—*New York Times*

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which reconstructions the evidence allows and which it rules out.

Here we (scientists) apparently part company with such writers as Marilyn French, even though her approach is empirical and inductive (so she tells us).

> This book is a study of the gender principles as I see them existing in Shakespeare's work. I did not bring my theory to the work; rather, the work of Shakespeare, when contrasted with the work of some twentieth-century authors . . . brought me to see as I do.

What are these gender principles, the foci of her book? They are described by the author as polar opposites, or at least the ends of a spectrum of sexual attributes; moreover, these end-points are imbued with values: maleness equates with aggression, power and the like; femaleness with compassion, nurturing and so on. Some lines of this sort can be drawn, but who has done it? The book's title, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience,* suggests that the allocation is the bard's, but at one point Dr. French states: "This is not to say that Shakespeare thought in terms of a feminine or masculine principle, but he did unquestionably think in terms of men and women . . . ." There's more than a little difference between the two conceptions of how our visions of the world are organized along sexual lines. Males and females can be seen: people and the roles they play are matters of observation—of evidence. Masculine and feminine principles are abstractions, requiring interpretation of what is seen (or read).

Ms. French, no doubt, believes her conception of herself as a scholar is that of a literary Linnaeus, discovering the division that the creator has ordained in his world of plays. However, I can't shake the feeling that the "species" she sees are, in good part, arbitrary creatures of her own world view. To continue the above quotation, she holds that "Shakespeare . . . did unquestionably think of men and women . . . not as similar members of a single species, but as very different creatures, subject to different needs and desires. . . ." Fortunately, Ms. French absolves Shakespeare of any *personal* responsibility for such a view, for, while joining in the "almost universal derogation of women," he is only continuing traditions which have prevailed since the dawn of our species.

> The fundamental split in human thinking is not gender but a perception of humans as separate from, different from nature. This perception was probably responsible for the survival of a species lacking the special physical or perceptual equipment possessed by other surviving animal species. Humans, rooted in and subject to natural environment and natural processes to the same degree as other animals, stood up on their hind legs,

> and used what they had—a brain more powerful than those of other animals, and a retractile thumb—to attempt to control an environment they were not especially adaptable to.

Even if we leave aside the peculiar syntax and the whiff of biological determinism for which Robert Ardrey or Konrad Lorenz would have been roasted mercilessly, this hypothetical sketch is simply wrong. It is contradicted by the facts. Fossil bones and clear human footprints over four million years old attest to the fact that at a time when our ancestors were walking around on two legs as we do, they were equipped with brains no larger than those of living chimps. We have here, then, a tragedy in the sense of Herbert Spencer: a beautiful theory killed by an ugly fact. Perhaps it would be nice if certain things were true, but not all issues can be judged by authorial preferences; facts will intrude now and again.

In the final analysis, I suspect that this book will be used more for its abundant, if terse, plot summaries. These comprise the bulk of the work, and college students taking their first course in Shakespeare will no doubt find them useful. I only hope that these readers won't take too seriously the brief introduction and conclusion from which they might be led to believe that Shakespeare is morally neutral (!) as well as antiwoman.

There is less need to worry that many readers will be misled—or led anywhere for that matter—by William Leach's *True Love and Perfect Union.* I'd wager that few of the readers tempted by its extravagant dust-jacket raves will even finish the book, which provides ample ammunition for those intellectuals within and without academe who maintain that doctoral dissertations rarely, if ever, make good books. Incidentally, I should note that I virtually knew this book began its existence as a dissertation simply because it read like supply in search of demand. After all, what publisher would have gone looking for a history of the social ideas of the American feminist movement, 1850-1875? Although there's no mention of the book's genesis in the Acknowledgments (or anywhere else), a

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quick look in *Dissertation Abstracts International* confirmed my hunch. *True Love,* etc., had been a 1977 dissertation at Rochester before being rewarmed, with abundant foundation support. for serving again in 1980.

Although I found Leach's work mostly just boring, occasional aspects of it were downright silly. One of these was the apparently central idea that much of the progressivism to be seen in American culture has its roots in feminism. The author does offer evidence that many progressive ideas were held by feminists (though a good few of their notions were absurd, such as advocating clothing described as "a grotesque blend of Turkish and Quaker," or worse—such as active admiration of German "eugenics" laws). However, to demonstrate logically and convincingly that the one movement not only followed, but followed *from* the other it would be necessary to demonstrate not only that some feminists held progressive ideas, but also that there were not any significant numbers of progressive nonfeminists. In failing to do this Leach's arguments giving retrospective value to the earlier feminist movement seem quite unconvincing. *True Love,* as a result, stands as a not-terribly-interesting catalogue of curious customs —rather like those 19th-century tracts on the ways of life of the world's curious savages. Perhaps that's why the designer chose a purple dust jacket . . . □

Clichés as Merchandise

Thomas Fleming: *The Officers' Wives;* Doubleday & Co.; New York.

by Otto J. Scott

One reward for watching old movies on late-night television is that one can see how the passage of time and changes in fashion cruelly expose the artifices of writers of the past, making outmoded assumptions appear both remote and ridiculous. Much the same can be said of aged novels. In recent months some long-held fashionable attitudes have undergone a seemingly abrupt change, and arguments once assumed to be contemporary have, nearly overnight, been rendered faded and antique.

This shift in intellectual fashion has caught, among others, Thomas Fleming's *The Officers' Wives.* When initially conceived, it must have impressed the editors at Doubleday as being a sure-fire hit, to use the jargon of the trade. First, it would be aimed at women, who buy most of the novels. Second, the women in the book would be better than the men, who would not be worthy of such fire, passion and sacrifice (with the possible exception of one intellectual rake, who would be irresistible while harboring all the fashionably liberal positions). Third, virtue and courage would be rewarded, and bastards would be punished, but not in a fashion too crude for credibility. Fourth, there would be many marital scenes in which sex would appear, but not in ugly language. Finally, the author, with ten previous novels and eight previous nonfiction works in print, would be able to provide such verisimilitude that Hollywood scriptwriters would have virtually no problem in turning this 645-page opus into a film.

Unfortunately the country changed between the time of conception and the printing of the novel. A book intended for the continuation of Carterland has appeared during Reagantime. And that shift in the attitudes of this nation make the artifices of author Fleming and his novel seem not only awkward and distorted, but also the very paradigm of what, for so long, has been wrong with so many American novels.

Although it was published in 1981 with a 1950's setting, when three recent West Point graduates marry three widely assorted women in the famous Chapel, *The Officers' Wives* echoes the attitudes of the 1920's, more specifically those made famous by Sinclair Lewis. Each of the officers, with one exception, is a Babbitt working for a huge and ridiculous corporation called the U.S. Army, in which promotion is gained by any means except honorable. The women in the novel are all, with one exception, Carol Kennicotts *(Main Street):* superior to the men, literate if not literary, brave and essentially honest, able—through second sight and intuition—to see through the foibles of men and society alike. All are entwined in marriages that should not have been formed and are essentially unhappy. The women face up to this problem; the men—in the main—do not. Only one of the men is literate in the true sense, which means that he leans toward Zen, extramarital affairs with the wives of his friends and rebellion against the Pentagon. He comes to a predictably bad end and his widow —a simpleton—turns to Jesus for comfort. The heroine, the author's favorite among his female characters, struggles bravely to be independent, even as an army wife, and teaches school. She repudiates a Catholicism that is depicted as narrow and stupid, and is rewarded by widowhood when her obtuse but brave husband is killed in Vietnam. This enables her to marry again and gives the brave woman a second chance to snare a major-general. Thus does life reward virtue.

There are other subplots and persons, of course, but these are sufficient to demonstrate the author's penchants. Innumerable sketches, scenes and observations make it clear that the novel depicts a nation sans subtlety of feelings, sans honor among men, and pictures women as suitable for better men from a better culture. That message, however, like many other themes in

Mr. Scott is a frequent contributor to these pages.

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the book, is subliminal and implicit rather than open and expressed. What is expressed is a persistent disdain for what might be called Americana.

To say that this sort of writing does a disservice to the American society and culture is to understate the case. Sinclair Lewis long ago dealt some savage blows to American businessmen in *Babbitt,* to small towns in America in *Main Street* and to Christianity in *Elmer Gantry.* He was not the first American author to attack hypocrites and bores, and hardly the first to ridiculously overrate women. His great gift was for caricature and mimicry: his exaggerations contained enough elements of recognizable truth to be credible. His admirers would argue, of course, that Lewis portrayed exceptions. But late in his life, when he was baited by some college students, he seemed unaware that his portraits had been accepted as realistic. He was hated by many for having damaged this country and its people; to the end he was unaware that he somewhat deserved that hatred. Writers like Fleming absorbed the attitudes of Lewis as easily as if they were air; after all, Lewis was only one of a long parade. His predecessors and intellectual heirs stretch as far as the eye can see. They infest Hollywood and television, they hog the booklists, they clog magazines, they occupy the lecture stage, they posture before students. They spread the universal myth of that species they have invented: *Americanus Fatuus.*

Travelers abroad meet that myth at every turn, with numerous variations. If one is male, he is told that American women are nymphomaniacs. One learns that we prefer musical comedies to dramatic plays, digests to books, insults to compliments. There is no region on earth, no place too barren for its inhabitants to sneer at Americans as recipients of God's mysterious bounty, rich but incredibly stupid, prosperous without merit, winners without brains. Cultural contempt for the United States is probably the only single subject upon which all other lands and races agree. To say that they can point to our own literature as proof, to our own films, newspapers, magazines and lecturers as evidence is to admit one of the most peculiar problems that ever confronted a great nation. For the myth does not simply travel abroad: it is fed and nurtured here at home. Students are taught American history in such a manner as to create indignation. The Germans have problems with guilt over Hitler, but they can at least point to other eras of their history that are worthy of pride. We have been denied the satisfaction of pride in *any* era of our history.

Writers like Fleming, fearful that there may be some lingering hope for the U.S. Army, will use fiction to make sure that such illusions, if alive, are destroyed. The editors at that great fiction factory, Doubleday, cheerfully agree. There is an agent at work, at this very instant, attempting to sell this novel to Hollywood and/or television.

No other country has ever been cursed with such a literature—with the possible exception of France during the last decades of the ancien régime, just before the revolution. The modern American, for all his tolerance, accomplishments and charity, must walk about with his back bent as though he represented some low, uncouth set of degenerates. Russians slaughter millions of their fellow countrymen, maintain slave camps and still they are accepted as a great people. Chinese communists have led massacres, but they are honored in every world capital. How many books appear about the Chinese genocide? How many writers rise in wrath against the U.S.S.R., as compared to those who find South Africa worse? America seems to be afflicted by an ominous scourge: we have writers who are not proud of us, and we therefore have very few writers of whom we can be proud. □

"Thomas Fleming, who can be ranked with Herman Wouk and James Jones . . . probes the heart of the American experience over the last 30 years with subtlety and intelligence."

—New York Times Book Review

Creative Muddle & Poignancy of Realism

D. M. Thomas: *The White Hotel;* The Viking Press; New York.

William Wharton: *Dad;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Christina Murphy

The White Hotel by D. M. Thomas and *Dad* by William Wharton exemplify opposite ends of the spectrum of contemporary fiction. *The White Hotel* is a symbolic novel, replete with complex imagery suggestive of deeper themes and more abstruse meanings. *Dad* is a realistic novel recounting the day-to-day struggles of two fathers and two sons as they come to terms with life, death, suffering and the greater puzzlement of the purpose of human existence. The imagery is minimal, the symbolism nonexistent; the power of the technique and the focus have a poignant impact on the reader's sensibilities.

Dr. Murphy is professor of English at Mississippi Industrial College.

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Evaluating symbolic novels and realistic novels is largely a case of the proverbial apples vs. oranges; the focus, the technique, the style and the power of the two forms are vastly different. The symbolic novel is often largely imagistic and impressionistic—a pointillism of words and recurring motifs designed to capture the reader's attention and to engage him in the mysteries of unraveling complex themes and strands of allusions and ideas. The tapestry effect is an apt metaphor for a symbolic novel's design, and the assessment of a symbolic novel is largely dependent upon how well the artist generates the tapestry and how well the performance is appreciated by the reader. *The White Hotel* is a typical example of the genre of the symbolic novel in its attempt to intertwine themes with imagistic portrayals. The story line itself is rather simple and sparse, but one does not know this until the final twist in the story's telling. The plot is presented detective-story fashion in that the focus of *The White Hotel* is the delineation of the identity and the psyche of Lisa Erdman, who comes to stand in the novel for many things, not the least of which is humanity itself and all the vast sufferings to which mankind has been exposed.

The story begins as an imaginary exchange of letters between Sigmund Freud and his disciples concerning a young woman patient of Freud's who has, as an aspect of her therapy, produced a journal which is highly erotic in nature. Freud spins an elaborate and psychoanalytically conventional explanation of Lisa's emotional problems, especially of her sexual frigidity and unhappy first marriage, tracing the cause to an unresolved homosexual attachment to Lisa's voice teacher. The reader feels that here, at last, he has a grasp upon Lisa's identity, but such is not the case, for no sooner has Freud created his very convincing explanation of Lisa's dilemmas than she, through her correspondence with Freud, reveals that she has lied several times to cover up painful events and feelings and that she has also either misremembered or totally forgotten essential parts of the puzzle, which she now adds for further clarification. Just when the reader feels safe in assuming that *The White Hotel* is a Jamesian turn of the screw on what truth is and the question whether there is such a thing as truth when all events can be seen from a variety of perspectives, the structure of *The White Hotel* shifts to conventional narrative, flashes forward a number of years, catches us up on Lisa's career as an

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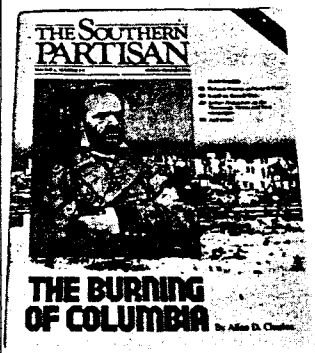

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opera singer, her fortuitous second marriage to an older man with a young son, and brings us into the climactic event of the novel—Lisa's incarceration in a nazi concentration camp and her death and that of her son. The novel's narrative technique shifts again in the final section, this time giving us fantasy and imagism interwoven into Lisa's return to the white hotel, her reunion with her dead mother, the healing of all childhood wounds in an act of forgiveness and love, and Lisa's final transcendence of death, presumably into the state of divine grace commonly associated with heaven.

One cannot fault D. M. Thomas for his style in *The White Hotel,* nor for the novel's structure. It is as complex a narrative as has been witnessed in contemporary fiction in a long while. Presumably, however, a novel is an organic entity, with its sets and subsets melding together into a dimension of artistic unity. Yet, for all the brilliance of Thomas's narrative, one can legitimately wonder what this book is all about, or, more precisely, why the elements of this novel are placed together in the way that they are. The novel most definitely breaks into two parts: the psychoanalytic mystery of a young woman's libidinous obsession, and the tale of an ordinary woman's life, culminating in the novel's most poignant section—the torture death of Lisa Erdman as one more casualty of human brutality. The two parts, however, seem not to fuse, and one wonders what the elucidation of Lisa's psyche has to do with the later events of her life, how her childhood traumas are essential to the story Thomas wishes to tell of history and massive human suffering amidst and within the context of everyday, simple lives. Neither is *The White Hotel* helped by the fact that the first part of the novel is far more interesting than the second. Lisa's death is the most poignant aspect of the novel, but it is set amidst some rather rambling and relatively dull recountings of her life in Germany as a wife and stepmother. In comparison with the unusually imaginative start of *The White Hotel,* the second part seems to falter. What the final section of the novel endeavors to elucidate is anyone's guess; the book is not cohesive enough to suggest what Lisa's transcendence into heaven may mean, given the story's preceding structure. Thomas's novel seems like an elaborately wrapped package which, once opened, reveals a jumble of pretty and intriguing items that never come together into any significant pattern. This is indeed unfortunate, for Thomas seems to be a writer of great creative gift and craft who, if he had had a finer sense of his subject or theme, might have produced a work of magnitude.

While *The White Hotel* seems unable to express its theme clearly and precisely, William Wharton's *Dad* is a model of the realistic novel in its ability to present a description of an ordinary life and its ordinary details. Stylistically, *Dad* is simple and unpretentious, quite the contrary of *The White Hotel.* Its message is clear and its theme is gently and easily presented. The story is that of a son's relationship to his father at a time when the father is critically ill and undergoing all the traumas of senility and old age. It is also the story of that son's relationship to his son and how the two perceive the older man's sufferings as related to their lives and whatever personal meaning and fulfillment they may wish to find in life.

It is unfortunate that the very merits which make *Dad* a poignant novel will keep it from attaining much success with literary critics. *The White Hotel,* with all its vast and puffed-up symbolism, is far more likely to receive critical praise among elitists than is *Dad. Dad* presents its message clearly and movingly; there is very little in *Dad* that requires extensive explication or analysis. Thus, contemporary critics are likely to overvalue *The White Hotel* and undervalue *Dad* simply because, since the days of James Joyce, any novel worth its salt must be heavily and contortedly symbolic and abstruse to win the praise of the literary establishment. It is indeed unfortunate to see the attempt to reflect on man's immediate reality so strongly undervalued in our era, for realism has the power to reveal profound truths in the simple actions of everyday life. While it is not likely to garner high critical praise, *Dad* is far more significant than *The White Hotel,* if only because of its power to engage the reader in the world of its protagonists and their sufferings. □

In the Mail

Shakespeare as Political Thinker edited by John Alvis and Thomas G. West; Carolina Academic Press; Durham, North Carolina. A collection of essays which consider the political thought of Shakespeare as evidenced in his plays.

Prairie Winds by George W. Dirreen; Vantage Press; New York. An historical novel based on the lives of the pioneers who first settled the Midwest.

Church Authority and Intellectual Freedom by Christopher Derrick; Ignatius Press; San Francisco. An analysis of the apparent conflict between Vatican authority and Catholic intellectual freedom.

Tombstone by William Hattich; University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, Oklahoma. A tribute to the historical significance of the town of Tombstone, Arizona, originally published in 1903; reissued in the same format with original photographs and a foreword by John D. Gilchriese.

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Standing on Principle

James Webb: *A Sense of Honor;* Prentice-Hall; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

by Robert C. Steensma

When the definitive history of the Vietnam War is eventually written, it will probably bear little resemblance to the mélange of half-truths and propaganda foisted upon the American public by George McGovern—who called the war "a blot upon American history" and compared the American effort there to Hitler's holocaust against the Jews—and his intellectual groupies during the last fifteen years. And while the historians assemble and assimilate their materials about the conflict in Southeast Asia, the novelists, particularly the younger ones who fought there, will provide accounts of what the agony was really like. The old stereotypes about the war have already begun to crumble in several recent books. In *A Rumor of War* (1977) Philip Caputo shows the horror of the war as seen by a group of marines betrayed by both the politicians and the public. A few months ago, in *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War,* Al Santoli convincingly destroyed the McGovern-Jane Fonda myth of the barbaric American imperialist trying to destroy a saintly Ho Chi Minh and committing genocide against the Vietnamese.

James Webb, a 1968 graduate of the Naval Academy and a highly decorated Marine officer in Vietnam, has published two novels dealing with the American military experience during the war. The first, the widely acclaimed *Fields of Fire* (1978), challenged the clichés of the antiwar movement by showing that the marines in Vietnam were men far more humane and complex than the caricatures created by the media. This novel may well become one of the classics of American military fiction. Webb's second and more recent novel, *A Sense of Honor,* concerns Vietnam only indirectly in that its setting is the Naval Academy in February 1968 when, thousands of miles away, the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese were launching the Tet offensive. While the men in the novel struggle toward spiritual maturity, the Red attack grinds down to disaster as the communists leave 45,000 of their own dead on the battlefields, a humiliating defeat which the American press managed to transmogrify into a communist victory, finally turning the American public against the war.

A Sense of Honor centers around four characters: Bill Fogarty, single-minded senior midshipman who seeks a commission in the Marine Corps and assignment to Vietnam; John Dean, a bright young plebe who hasn't yet cut

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LIBERAL CULTURE

Military Revelations

Time magazine recently attracted our attention to a book by a certain Helen Rogan, entitled *Mixed Company: Women in the Modern Army,* which, in the opinion of the magazine's perceptive editors, is "groundbreaking." *Time* elaborates on the book's revelationary character and the precision of its insights:

> The women's physical standard was slightly different, mainly because men are generally larger and possess greater upper-body strength.

The discovery that men are generally larger is indeed awesome. What bedazzles us even more, however, is the statement's invitation to deductive reasoning. Should we infer that, in contrast to men's *upper*-body strength, women possess a superior *lower*-body strength? Can this acute observation change the nature of warfare or the Pentagon's planning? But *Time* has more to tell us:

> Keeping the women the Army already has is a problem. Many leave because of pregnancy (about 8% a year get pregnant). The solutions, Rogan believes, are child care and

better provisions for pregnancy leave.

We can perceive the dire difficulties inherent in these concerns, but they seem to us solvable, given Ms. Rogan's expertise and zeal. The establishment of a belt of day-care centers on a perimeter of, say, 15 miles from the front, may do the job. After all, it would be cruel to deprive fighting mothers of a refreshing visit to their tots after a day of slaughter, killing and mayhem. Why should women be forced to commute any farther? □

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his mother's apron strings; Ted Lenahan, a Marine captain, gravely wounded in Vietnam, who now serves as a company officer at the Academy; and Professor Jonathan Thad, a young and self-righteous civilian instructor at the Academy who can recite the Bill of Rights but knows nothing of its significance for human beings and the world in which they live.

Fogarty takes it upon himself to make a man and a leader out of Dean just as his recently dead (in the Tet offensive) friend did to him several years before. He pushes Dean—known to his derisive classmates as Baby Blue—to his mental, spiritual and physical limits, driving him to realize his potential as a man. Dean survives and matures with the most perilous feat of all—sprinting with Fogarty on the ice-covered sea wall in the predawn darkness. He becomes a man, and, as Lenahan later says, "Fogarty taught him more about himself in four days than he'd learned in nineteen years." At the end, after the political blackmail of Professor Thad forces Fogarty to leave the Academy, Dean himself realizes thankfully how much he owes his mentor. Captain Lenahan, the product of the South Boston streets, divorced by a wife who betrayed him while he was in combat, and still suffering psychologically from his war experiences, watches Dean move toward manhood. He does not interfere until he realizes that Thad's deep-seated bigotry toward the military will be manifested in an attempt to destroy both Fogarty and the Naval Academy. Thad succeeds in getting Fogarty dismissed and Lenahan sent back to Vietnam, but the Academy survives.

Rear Admiral Kraft, the sensitive and humane superintendent of the Academy who has to act on Thad's allegations, is himself a victim of the political and public neurosis that permits Thad to destroy any semblance of the courage, integrity and individualism that are necessary to a leader. As Webb describes him, "Kraft was not a technocrat who could run a nuclear submarine, and he was not a politician who could be comfortable with the sophistry of Pentagon politics. He was a sea dog and a combat leader. The navy had chewed on him for thirty years, and it would soon spit him out." Like Kraft, Lenahan, too, has learned a bitter lesson about American leadership in the late 60's. Describing Fogarty's treatment of Dean to the Admiral, he comments, "But that's using discretion, and nobody trusts discretion anymore. In the meantime we've worked up regulations about how to lead, how to discipline, what you can say, what you can ask. So my man has violated regulations. Big deal. Go ask Baby Blue if it hurt him. For the first time in his life he feels proud of himself. He ran the goddamn seawall in the dark this morning. Christ, he wouldn't even go *outside* in the dark a week ago." But faced with the political realities of a nation in turmoil, Admiral Kraft can reply only with bitterness, "When you stand on principle, you take your chances." Earlier, as he listens to the fatuous Commander Pratt, the textbook ideal of the civilian or military middle manager, Lenahan thinks, "Regulations . . . Now we have regulations about how to lead. Don't use your head or your force or your spirit. Follow the instructions, as if you're building a model airplane or a goddamn computer. They don't trust people anymore."

The conflict between Fogarty and Dean is paralleled by another which is equally important. The tension between Thad and Lenahan reflects the loss of direction and moral vitality that America suffered during the war. Thad is the earnest young intellectual, probably from a middle-class home, who has undoubtedly gone straight from kindergarten through the Ph.D. and into his first teaching job without ever having, as Richard III describes Richmond in Shakespeare's play, "Felt so much cold as over shoes in winter." He is ignorant of human nature and history, and his ignorance, compounded by his arrogant, misdirected civil libertarianism, is only destructive. Had Thad been teaching at a civilian university he would have been mindlessly frothing at a teach-in about "American imperialism." Lenahan, on the other hand, represents the traditional values—honor, honesty, sincerity, courage, integrity, humaneness—to which Thad and his lawyer friend, Tom Stiles, are strangers. Lenahan knows the agonies Dean is going through, but he also realizes that if the young man fails these tests of character he may very well fail more crucial ones in his military career when the lives of others depend on him.

Thus *A Sense of Honor* deals with a conflict in values, a conflict between the soft, shabby moral relativism of Thad and Stiles on the one hand and the tougher, more demanding, more realistic values of Fogarty and Lenahan

In the Mail

The Inter-American Foundation: A Mandate for Leadership Report by Cleto DiGiovanni, Jr.; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, D.C. An examination of the philosophy, practice, administration, etc. of the Inter-American Foundation, a public corporation created to devise and implement new assistance programs for Latin American groups untouched by other foreign aid efforts.

The Wayward Welfare State by Roger A. Freeman; The Hoover Institution Press; Stanford, California. An examination and evaluation of the enormous investment in and costs of governmental programs and their positive or negative returns to America.

Growing Up in the Midwest edited by Clarence A. Andrews; Iowa State University Press; Ames, Iowa. A collection of twenty-two essays by such authors as Edna Ferber, Langston Hughes, R. V. Cassill and others.

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on the other. Caught in the middle are Dean and Admiral Kraft. Dean sticks with it and wins; Kraft, though fully appreciating the significance of Dean's experience, must sadly yield to the politicians and public-relations people for whom moral cowardice is the better

part of valor. As Webb suggests late in the book, "Honor was a microscope. It could also be a guillotine." For all of the major characters honor is a set of lenses under which their souls are minutely examined and tested; for several it almost becomes an instrument of execution.

Webb's fine novel paints a picture of a time in American history when, as never before in our experience, radical demagoguery swept the country and viciously attacked all that is necessary for the survival of a healthy society, and in the process demonstrated the truth of Evelyn Waugh's observation that "When the waterholes were dry, people sought to drink at the mirage." Politicians metamorphosed themselves overnight from hawk to dove in order to protect their careers, and in their haste to disparage their country and its armed forces they proved the truth of Flaubert's maxim: "Our ignorance of history makes us vilify our own age." Just a few, exemplified by Fogarty, Lenahan and Dean, remained true to themselves and their ideals. They may prove to be both our rescue and our redemption. □

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COMMENDABLES

Giving & Taking Life

Jacobo Timerman: *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

> Only God gives and takes life. But God is busy elsewhere, and we're the ones who must undertake this task in Argentina.
>
> —Captain Beto, Argentine army officer

One shrinks from confronting this statement directly; its embrace of evil is too bold, its implications too frightening. Yet Jacobo Timerman confronted it; he had no choice, for Captain Beto spoke these words to him. *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* is a passionate *cri de coeur* of a man who was sucked into the abyss, and with suicide and madness whispering their temptations in his ear, he fought his way back to the light. If life imitates art, then Timerman's incarceration and torture at the hands of right-wing fanatics is a Dostoyevskian tale married to a story out of Franz Kafka. But Timerman's book is no literary exercise; the pain is too real: "It's impossible to shout—you howl."

Timerman does indeed, as his critics charge, omit from his book certain damning facts about the reason for his arrest, and surely his meddling in debates over American foreign policy can only be described as tawdry; yet these facts do not undermine the power of his book. In creating the "Timerman Affair" American leftists have made the book a partisan rallying cry. Would the left have seized upon this book had it come from a Cuban refugee? Yet Timerman himself condemns Castro's Cuba, and he denounces Argentina's extremists of the left in no uncertain terms. He knew that leftist terrorists wanted to kill him as surely as did their counterparts on the right. American conservatives have erred in assailing Timerman's book, for in doing so they have relinquished the high ground of moral outrage to the leftists. Timerman *was* tortured; Argentina *is* a sadly chaotic society: however much one might challenge Timerman's contention that another Holocaust is brewing in Argentina, it would be foolish to deny the moral force of his denunciation of torture as a routine fact of life. American conservatives blew this one. □

The Calm & Objective Admiral

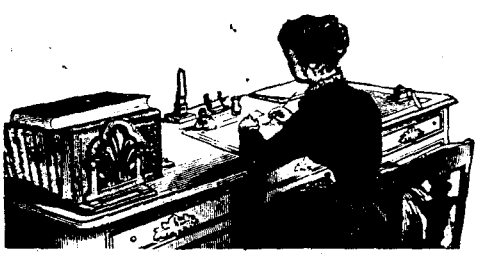
From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford: edited by Stephen Jurika; Stanford University Press; Stanford, California.

Admiral Radford was a prominent commander of World War II and rose to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1953 to 1957. He did more, perhaps, than any other individual to shape post-Korea defense policies. His memoirs are sadly foreshortened, for Admiral Radford died after finishing the section on the first Indochina War. Though well written, the book is of interest mostly to a rather specialized audience: those who are interested in the development of foreign and defense policies in the 1940's and 1950's. There is much material here for people who want to explore the problems of armed-forces unification, the B-36 controversy and the Korean War, which he, perhaps unjustly, blames on General Marshall.

Radford's evaluation of the postwar era is basically favorable to President Truman. But he stresses a point which it has recently been fashionable to overlook: that the American armed forces were allowed to deteriorate to a dangerous extent before the war. Indeed, he suggests that had the communists waited another year to invade South Korea the United States would have been incapable of responding effectively. Curiously, despite his high opinion of Truman and Acheson, Radford sided with General MacArthur in the Truman-MacArthur dispute. There is some material here of great interest to anyone studying that controversy. Most notable is Radford's contention that the transcript of the Wake Island conference of October 1950 was inaccurate, and that MacArthur clearly indicated to those present that he assumed that any Chinese intervention would evoke a counter-attack directed against China itself. His treatment of those events is calm and objective in tone, something which cannot be said of most writers on that subject—even those who were not participants.

One wonders, however, to what extent Radford's coverage of various subjects was affected by their later prominence. Over a fifth of the book, and most of his treatment of 1953-54, covers the last events of the first Indochina War. It is hard to believe that he has not exaggerated its importance to the Eisenhower administration — although Radford amply proves his sardonic contention that "Vietnam was not the surprise that many of its detractors would now like to believe." Again, those who are not thoroughly sick of Indochina will find interesting material here, particularly on the bungling of the French and the development of the so-called domino theory.

It is curious to note that, in August 1953, officials of the State and Defense Departments concluded that public opinion would not support a contribution to the Indochina conflict beyond the then-current aid program, i.e. that the American people would not back armed intervention by our own forces. One wonders why later administrations felt entitled to draw a different conclusion—though it is clear that the Eisenhower administration actually underestimated the American people's willingness to sacrifice. Perhaps the overwhelming impression left by the Radford memoirs is the dismal continuity of so many of our defense and foreign-policy problems. (AJL) □



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Guns, Laws, Rights

Alan M. Gottlieb: *The Rights of Gun Owners;* Caroline House Publishers; Aurora, Illinois.

The hard face of liberal irrationality shows itself nowhere more clearly than on the issue of gun control. Most liberals own no guns; indeed, they break out in a cold sweat at the mere sight of one, unless, of course, the offensive weapon be wielded by a ghetto child or a Third World revolutionary: then it becomes an accessory of sainthood. Liberal fantasies roam freely over the psychic landscape in an effort to stereotype gun owners. In the resulting fanciful construct, the gun owner becomes a beetle-browed redneck, seething with rage against feminists, blacks, Jews and homosexuals. To vent his rage he kills anything that moves, from fluffy-tailed rabbits to limpid-eyed deer. Besides, everyone knows he is impotent, for his attachment to gun barrels betrays a Freudian obsession with his own inadequacies. By such flights of fantasy the liberal transforms those threatening rednecks in pickup trucks into figures of liberal demonology.

It would be foolish to deny that "gun nuts" exist; we have all known that individual whose house resembles a well-stocked arsenal and whose unstable ego demands reassurance from a .357-magnum revolver. But do we disarm everyone in order to control these few? The Bill of Rights clearly guarantees the right to bear arms, and the desire to exercise this right is deeply embedded in the American character. Alan Gottlieb defends gun ownership, shows its firm foundation in law and historic practice and reminds gun owners that responsibilities must always accompany rights. His state-by-state listing of gun-control ordinances conveys the message that gun owners must obey the laws of the land, even when they find those laws burdensome. In a curious turnabout, a good deal of lawlessness springs not from gun owners but, as Mr. Gottlieb shows, from the zealous agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms who practice harassment and entrapment in their efforts to disarm the populace. It would be good to live in a society where criminals were lovable scoundrels and citizens felt no need to arm themselves in self-defense. But until that day arrives, we had best recognize the profound truth contained in a favorite slogan of gun lobbyists: "When Guns Are Outlawed, Only Outlaws Will Own Guns." □

IN FOCUS

Let's Discuss It

Samuel L. Blumenfeld: *Is Public Education Necessary?;* The Devin-Adair Co.; Old Greenwich, Connecticut.

by George M. Curtis III

This tempestuous, argumentative book raises more questions than it answers. Ostensibly the question posed in the title suggests a utilitarian treatment of a vexing contemporary issue. Not so. Blumenfeld concentrates his attention upon 18th- and 19th-century perpetrators of the monster we have come to know as public education. His title then is rhetorical, for a resoundingly negative answer is presumed throughout. In what appears to be a hastily crafted book, Blumenfeld, a staunch defender of private education, seeks to identify and analyze the people, ideas and ideologies that contributed to the victory of public education by 1850.

Blumenfeld's historical landscape is dreary, monopolized as it is with the likes of Robert Owen, Horace Mann, the rank and file of Unitarianism, the kindred spirits of the new communitarian movements and the champions of secular statism. From a late 20th-century perspective, it often comes as a depressing surprise to learn that there existed strong-minded reformers in the generation after the Founders who advocated the positive state and who viewed it as a social, political and cultural force to manipulate behavior so as to serve the ends of the state. Adding to Blumenfeld's distress is his discovery that most of this jaded group were, in actuality, the twisted progeny of New England Calvinism—albeit by then shorn of faith in either theocracy or education governed by Protestant churches or church leadership. Blumenfeld is offended by both the godlessness of Owen and the heresy of Unitarianism and finds in each a sinister and ominous portent for an increasingly secularized and intrusive state. All these disturbing trends seem to culminate in Horace Mann, the long-time secretary for the Massachusetts Board of Education and the intellectual father of universal, state-operated education.

It is Blumenfeld's obvious purpose to discredit these people and their ideas, no matter how benign their individual views might have been. The shrill, angry tone that pervades this book becomes troublesome. It prompts one to wonder whether the intemperate presentation might cost the author his chance for a fair hearing from those he really seeks to persuade. Obviously those already committed to his views might find welcome reinforcement in his trumpetlike calls. But does Blumenfeld really believe that his insights and suggestions will win a lasting intellectual beachhead on those influential desert islands known as colleges of education? Perhaps Blumenfeld does not care about this audience, preferring instead to clear his lungs among friends. If so, one wonders why.

Ultimately his intemperance does neither his defenders nor his pertinent criticisms any real and lasting service. His excursion into American history is so patently adversarial that his hypotheses become vulnerable to any attack which utilizes contrary evidence. This intellectual strip-mining of the American past for the purpose of fueling the fires of contemporary argument is a comparatively simple job. Cutting and pasting bits and pieces from the lives and ideas of a select few and interspersing contemporary commentary makes for interesting grist for those political mills already dedicated to a particular mission. But it does little to change people's minds or to do real justice to the American past. The adage about truth being stranger than fiction applies to this book. When history is fodder, then a proportional equation goes into effect: the better the history, the more convincing the argument. The converse is also true. One hopes that Blumenfeld has not made a tomb

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for the subject. The questions he raises about the relationship of the state and education transcend the treatment he provides; they deserve an articulate response based on the historical record, which is far more complex and compelling than the world he portrays. □

A Little Allegory

Toni Morrison: *Tar Baby;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Jane Ball

Imagine if you will that American society could be reduced to an island microcosm. Imagine that blacks and whites with their racial prejudices, stereotypes and mutual misconceptions could be personified in six people: two white, four black. If you can imagine that, you have *Tar Baby.*

In Toni Morrison's latest novel, Valerian Street is a wealthy white man who presides over his Caribbean island estate with genteel despotism. He has a wife, Margaret; two black servants, Sidney and Ondine; and a beautiful young black protégeé, Jadine, who is also the niece of his two servants. The island estate is a paradise: money has provided everything that nature neglected or forgot.

Then—in much the same way that the serpent infiltrated Eden—an intruder disturbs the apparent tranquility of Valerian Street's world, which ultimately shatters into dangerous shards of suspicion and dislike. The intruder is a young black man who calls himself, among other things, Son, and he breaks in upon this serene household like a burglar. His shocking appearance—long, dirty dreadlocks, unbathed body, bare feet and filthy clothes—terrifies Margaret, who discovers him hiding in her clothes closet. Yet it is soon discovered that, aside from having pilfered enough food to survive, Son has no nefarious designs on anything or anyone in the household. Once he is bathed, shaved and barbered, he is a very attractive, personable young man.

Son is attracted to Jadine and, to her annoyance, she finds she is attracted to him, too. Their eventual love affair takes them to New York, then to his hometown in Florida, then back to New York. Their differences in outlook gradually sever the fragile connection of their love for each other, and Jadine flees back to Valerian Street's Caribbean home.

The change in that household is striking and dreadful. Valerian, before so sure in his position, power and wealth, seems to have declined to near invalidism. The two once-confident servants are on edge, distrustful and waiting. Margaret, the wife, is eerily cheerily taking care of Valerian's needs, apparently happy that he at last has a need for her and that she has a new-found purpose in life. Jadine quickly leaves the island for Paris, hoping to find some semblance of the life she had before Son's appearance. Son, in the meantime, waits for her in New York until it becomes obvious that she will not be returning. Then he goes to the island, and the book ends with him looking for Jadine.

Toni Morrison tells this story with all the apparent delight of a wordsmith. She toys with imagery as if she were constructing a delicate filigree of words. There are times, though, when this style gets in the way of the story and seems merely cute instead of masterful. However, the strength of the novel is not so much in style and plot as it is in the remarkable treatise on

black-white, man-woman relationships couched in the book. Most obvious is the symbolistic story of the race situation in America since the 1950's. Here is how the metaphor should be read: White-dominated American society was resting comfortably between World War I and World War II. Blacks (personified by Sidney and Ondine) stayed in their place for the most part and concerned themselves either with "earning" the respect of whites through diligent performance of menial tasks or with upward mobility through education (personified by Jadine). Whites (Valerian and Margaret) were tolerant and in some ways generous and often provided the security blacks believed they wanted.

However, the black militant, the new Negro (Son) burst upon this world in the late 50's and 60's, refusing to be like other blacks, wanting to be himself. The other, more conventional blacks didn't quite know how to handle him; he frightened some whites (Margaret) and fascinated others (Valerian). But he wanted neither integration nor separatism; he wanted simply to have what *he* wanted (Jadine). He couldn't relate to the aspirations of the "traditional" Negro and he couldn't (or wouldn't) change just to suit their expectations.

The encounter of these human elements of American society altered them all, except that the new Negro was still unable or unwilling to understand or be accepted either by traditional blacks or by whites. He remains a maverick, searching for what *he* wants, not what others say he should want.

Examined in this light, *Tar Baby* is a neat little allegoric tale. Yet there is still more to the novel than searching eyes find just under the surface story. It is not a happy book because it is about traps laid for blacks and whites alike in this world dominated by the white man with his judgments about what life *must* be like. Toni Morrison tries to show that the strong who struggle against these constrictions struggle alone for the most part because black men don't understand black women, and white men don't even *try* to understand white women. □

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Against Stereotypes

Jack Chen: *The Chinese of America;* Harper & Row; New York.

by D. P. Diffine

In *The Chinese of America,* Jack Chen, himself a Chinese immigrant, examines the experience of his countrymen who have migrated to the United States since the middle of the 19th century. He deals with the reception they received upon arrival, the exclusion acts that sought to stop the flow of immigration from the East, and the problems these people have faced in finding their place in American society.

The U.S. Immigration Commission began to record the arrival of Chinese as early as 1820,

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but it was not until midcentury that the Chinese population in the United States began to grow significantly. Spurred by the promises held out by the California gold rush, they poured into the United States to seek their fortunes. Because of the large influx of Chinese immigrants, anti-Chinese movements soon arose among white Americans. This hostility led to the passage of several exclusion acts. Violence against Chinese - Americans was commonplace, and they faced harrassment, raids and deportation.

As the era of exclusion acts and harassment gradually passed in the 20th century, Chinese-Americans built a reputation for discipline, integrity and hard work. Many Chinese-Americans have moved to the suburbs and established themselves as members of the middle class. Their sons and daughters frequently excel in their studies, and after graduation they take jobs in a variety of important professions. Still, those Chinese who live in America's Chinatowns face grave problems. High rates of unemployment, crowded living conditions, low educational levels and the breakdown of the family make their lives considerably more difficult than those of their suburban counterparts. Yet even here, new organizations have been formed to deal with these problems.

Jack Chen's book serves as a useful introduction to the Chinese-American experience. It helps one to understand the problems that these people have faced in gaining acceptance in their adopted country, and it makes clear the contributions that Chinese-Americans have made to the United States. With the aid of Chen's book, one can go beyond the stereotypes that have so often been pinned upon this relatively small, but by no means insignificant, group of immigrants. □

WASTE OF MONEY

Fathers and Mothers

Joyce Maynard: *Baby Love;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

Frederick Busch: *Take This Man;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Bertram Lippman

One of these two novels is about fathers and the other is about mothers. In an age when a practice identified by social scientists as "parenting" is being codified and subjected to rules, the two books should be edifying, or at least entertaining. They ought to help us clarify our ideas about what we are doing with ourselves. It would be good if they did so, but unfortunately, they do not.

Baby Love is about motherhood. The mothers Joyce Maynard presents are ignorant, uneducated, idle, unambitious and empty-headed. They swagger or shamble through their teen-age years, seemingly confident of themselves and their appetites and tastes. They appear to show precocious sexual sophistication, but they fall victim to premature sexual desuetude, the product of their ignorance and lack of imagination. They slide into marriage and motherhood unthinkingly. These young women form their "thoughts" from the fatuous titles and puerile lyrics of popular songs. These children of the new generation are self-indulgent and dissatisfied dependents.

As mothers, the girls do not neglect or abuse their babies, nor do they resent their coming, but they learn nothing from being mothers. They will pass through motherhood as they passed through junior high school, as nearly unaffected as possible. It is hard to imagine that the babies will learn much from the mothers And neither will the reader. *Baby Love* should have been entitled *Infantile Minds.*

Frederick Busch's novel about love and fathers is a contrivance, the product of an orderly, decent, conscientious mind with touches of modern artifice—a few dirty words about women, a meticulous description of the seduction of a boy by a girl, a graphic, "sensitive" scene of a young woman masturbating, references to jazz and popular music.

The hero is a Southerner based in an army camp in Illinois at the close of World War II. He is a conscientious objector, even against the war to stop Hitler. Along comes a girl, on her way to the West coast to marry a young man she doesn't love. In the impetuosity of sudden rapture, she makes love to the protagonist, who doesn't object conscientiously, and then continues West to her marriage, leaving her love behind.

Twelve years later, she sends her son to find his father in the same little prairie town where she left him. The mother follows, having fled her husband, and the three take up family life together. Good people. A normal, contented, loving, citizenly life. In 1963 the son gets caught up with revolutionaries in Maine, where the family is now living. The radicals are unsavory creatures, "beatniks living like lice on the land." They ask the *Village Voice* to publicize their intended destruction of a naval installation. Rescued by his own nature, and his parents' good sense, the young man ends up a New York City lawyer, a part of the establishment. What has happened to the rebellious youth of the Vietnam era? To judge from this book, conventionality. □

Dr. Lippman writes his essays in New York.

Our Age's Beastiary

Wilfred Burchett: *At the Barricades: Forty Years on the Cutting Edge of History;* Times Books; New York.

When posterity parcels out the culpability for the horrors perpetrated by communism in the 20th century, a good deal of the blame will fall upon those Western intellectuals who wielded the power of the word to condone murder in the name of social justice. The intellectual as agitprop journalist has become a familiar sight in the West. Louis Fischer of the *New York Post* outlined in the 1920's the pattern by which his successors could cut their own cloth: travel to communist nations as a foreign correspondent, ingratiate oneself with the *apparatchiks* and cable out dispatches that substitute wishful thinking for hard realities.

Self-delusion, ignorance and prevarication are small prices to pay for a seat on the locomotive of history. But Fischer at least had the decency later to confess his complicity with evil; *The God that Failed* contains his *mea culpa.*

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The Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett might, by contrast, have entitled his book *The God That Succeeded.* Burchett remains singularly devoid of doubt of either himself or his god; from Stalin to Castro, he has served the interests of communist totalitarianism. The Gulag will not register in Burchett's mind; facts and reason bounce off the rock-hard surface of his ineluctable commitment. The list of victims sacrificed to the twisted vision of Karl Marx grows ever longer, but Burchett continues his ideological whoring. Some men remain unfooled by the Wilfred Burchetts of this world, but others willingly place scales upon their own eyes. Harrison E. Salisbury, praised by many as a paragon of journalistic integrity, gladly contributes an introduction to Burchett's book and exalts him as a man compelled into the fray "because he believes in the underdog." Underdog — the magic word: but how many tears has Wilfred Burchett shed for those underdogs whose corpses rot in the mass graves dug by Stalin and Mao? How much compassion has he bestowed upon those who peer through prison bars in proletarian paradises?

One finds it difficult to fathom the malevolence that suppurates in the heart of a Wilfred Burchett. Such unmitigated devotion to evil defies one's understanding of the normal range of human motivation. One might be tempted to dismiss him as nothing more than what Max Eastman called a "mush head liberal," a man whose combination of naiveté, silliness and misguided idealism seduces him into supporting ignoble causes. But those who would take Burchett so lightly commit a drastic — and, if the Burchetts eventually triumph, a fatal — mistake. Nothing will exonerate Burchett in the eyes of decent men. He has looked straight into the face of the beast, and, turning away with a perverse smile, has said: "Yes, I shall serve this master."

From our present historical perspective, Burchett's ideological allegiance, so convincing to all the Salisburys of the American fellow traveler's universe, is nothing but partnership in the most murderous political enterprise of our century. We hope that, for once, the *New York Times* will be taken to proper account for all the magnanimity it has bestowed on Burchett by reviewing his books "fairly" and by reverently printing his cynical observations in its Op-Ed pages. □

Sexualia

Avodah K. Offit: ***Night Thoughts: Reflections of a Sex Therapist;*** Congden & Lattès; New York.

Marion Zola: ***All the Good Ones Are Married;*** Times Books; New York.

Wallace, Wallace, Wallechinsky & Wallace: ***The Intimate Sex Lives of Famous People;*** Delacorte Press; New York.

Sol Gordon: ***The Teenage Survival Book;*** Times Books; New York.

With qualified certitude, we can maintain that each of the above titles constitutes cultural refuse that emanates the stench of cultural scavenging. The more our culture accords such pursuits an unrestrained hearing, the more effectively and repulsively it accomplishes its own decay. The outpouring of sex manuals and porno devices — disguised as research, social service, information or how-to instructions for coping with human concerns ranging from the use of uterine contraceptives to inferiority complexes — has reached proportions which threaten social sanity. We do not hesitate to call the authors of the above-listed books commercial leeches, parasites feeding on the collapse of sociocultural criteria that took place during the 1970's. We are not impressed by their titles: "clinical psychiatrist at Cornell," "MA from Columbia University in English literature," "best-selling novelists" or "professor of Child & Family Studies." To us, they are all peddlers in the kind of porno merchandise that used to be offered for pennies in Paris's Montmartre, their intentions and their scholarly or scientific jargon notwithstanding. The point is that today this schlock costs much more, and a fraudulent social utilitarianism has been tacked on the purveyors' efforts which mendaciously promulgates an image of social usefulness and moral correctness. However, the fact is that, contrary to their shrilly boasted do-goodism, they are drowning the popular culture in a maelstrom of vulgar banality. Sexual propensities, deeds, exertions and longings lose their meaning and "expert advice" ferociously assaults normal human sensitivities, conventions and traditions which have been evolved by mankind through millennia. The balance between sexual endeavors and the social attitudes of discretion and restraint concerned with those endeavors once constituted one of humanity's most prized accomplishments. It seems that this asset is being flushed away by a tidal wave of psychiatric, therapeutic and professorial mud, and this tsunami is being frantically promoted by once-honorable New York City publishers.

Our first kudos goes to Professor Sol Gordon from Syracuse University who, in his book, advises a teen-age girl:

> The main problem is that *most* young people experimenting with their first intercourse do not use birth control. Many girls think it is not romantic to be prepared. Irresponsible boys feel it's the girl's job to worry about birth control. Some girls fall for lines like, 'Don't worry about it, I'll pull out in time,' or, 'I don't get any feeling when I use a rubber (condom)' or, 'It's too expensive.' Girls should respond . . . 'All the boys I know enjoy it with a condom on. What's wrong with you?'

Regardless of how well-intentioned Professor Gordon may be, he seems unaware that he is propagandizing not hygiene but whorishness, which turns him, at least in our eyes, into a doleful but harmful nitwit.

The top kudos belongs to the Wallechinsky/Wallace family which has moved on from selling herring (an honorable occupation on the Lower East Side at one time) to selling some more malodorous, but infinitely more profitable, goods. The technique used in both enterprises seems much the same, and after reading the Wallace opus one feels like putting one's mind under a shower to wash off all the stickiness and slime. Being exposed for almost 600 pages to bedsheets, underwear and every nook and cranny in the bodies of people whom we know from literature or the movies makes one wish that Gary Cooper would rise from his grave, slowly walk to the Wallechinsky/Wallace dwelling, kick in the door and bash the four authors' mugs into walls, floors and furniture — and exit with a dignified gait. Only then would we feel that justice had been done. □

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A Duologue on Pictorial Essayism & Other Impressions

Chariots of Fire; Screenplay by Colin Welland; Directed by Hugh Hudson; A Ladd Company & Warner Brothers Release.

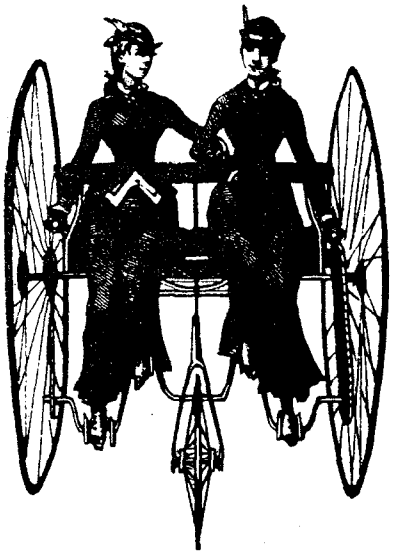
Chariots of Fire would seem doomed to failure; it contains none of the essentials that earmark a film for success—no sex, no violence, no cynicism, no slick commercialism, no faddish leftism. Most shocking of all, the hero is a Bible-quoting Presbyterian Scot. In an age accustomed to the antihero and the hero as buffoon (after the manner of Burt Reynolds) Eric Liddell, the devoutly religious Scotsman who won the 400-meter event in the 1924 Olympic Games, is an unlikely protagonist.

At the outset of the film one hears the grinding of ideological axes in the offing, for the story opens with the arrival at Cambridge University of Harold Abrahams, a young Jew who has come up to Caius College. Abrahams is a runner who pursues the sport to prove himself better than the non-Jews and to force the anti-Semites to acknowledge his superiority. With this beginning, one expects yet another lugubrious tale of oppression, with fair-haired Cambridge Wasps cast as the villains.

But Abrahams, intent as he is upon ferreting out even the most veiled of slights, actually encounters little overt anti-Semitism. He wins immediate acclaim by surpassing the centuries-old mark for the College Dash. He successfully carries off a leading role in the College's production of *Pinafore* and readily finds acceptance among his Gentile classmates. Yet Abrahams remains obsessed with the need to win at all costs, for he cannot bear the stigma of defeat. In violation of the Cantabrigian tradition of amateurism, he hires a professional trainer to prepare him for the Olympics. His victory in the 100-yard dash in Paris seems predestined; his fanatical dedication and adamantine determination leave no room for setbacks or surprises. He wins the race, of course, but his victory is anticlimactic; it leaves him sullen and morose. There is a certain gracelessness in Harold Abrahams's pursuit of the gold medal.

Eric Liddell agonizes over his athletic prowess. He tries to combine his running with lay preaching, but his sister's admonition that he is sacrificing God to his own ambition troubles him. He forges a bargain with his God: he will prepare assiduously for the Olympics and after the games he will forsake running for the life of a missionary in China. But God reneges, for just as Liddell boards the ship for France he learns that the first heat for the 100-yard dash—his event as well as that of Abrahams—will be run on a Sunday. God's will is clear: Liddell will not run on the Sabbath. Even appeals to his patriotism by the Prince of Wales and members of the British Olympic Committee will not budge him. But when another runner relinquishes to Liddell his own spot in the 400-meter event, Liddell runs and wins. As he approaches the finish line, words of exaltation run through his mind: "God made me to serve Him, but He also made me fast. I run for his pleasure."

The chic set in the centers of cultural



fashion must find this hard to swallow, for it flies in the face of all the supposedly enlightened wisdom of our day. A Presbyterian Scot who runs for the glory of God? Surely this will not do. Yet it *will* do, for in Eric Liddell *Chariots of Fire* presents an inspiring—but not sentimental—hero.

—*Adrian Speracino*

* * *

The art of drama was, and is, a study in change—characters, circumstances, events interact, influence each other and shape themselves into a story. In *Chariots of Fire* nothing changes from beginning to end, although a lot happens. But nothing *can* change in and around its protagonists because they already *are* their own ideas of how they themselves should be as humans and persons. Thus, the drama is located not in the flow of facts but in the static resolution to uphold a principle. The rest of the movie is a statement—visual cinematic—on those ideas and their moral value. Such a loose structural form, not to mention the preponderance of the philosophical comment inherent in it, makes the movie a pictorial essay of unusual beauty and richness.

It is an account of a portion of the lives of two men, and it is so delicately delineated that it scarcely matters whether it is biography or fiction. In fact it is neither. It is a divagation on achievements as they are related to intense yearnings which, in turn, are rooted in the complexities of thought and emotion. Nor is a plot of any importance in this movie: it relies on dialectics, reasoning, mood, evocation of the period and graphic impressions. It tells the story of two British sprinters who won gold medals at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris—a true story about authentic persons, each of whom saw track-and-field competition in a unique and idiosyncratic way. Litera-

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ture and movies about athletics have always been concerned with being stronger, faster, more agile, and how these properties may serve simple goals and feelings—ambition, success, pride, patriotism, financial enrichment. Not this time. One of the runners is Harold Abrahams, son of wealthy Jews from Eastern Europe. He is a first-generation Britisher who worships Anglo-Saxon tradition, British culture, the majesty of Britishness. He is obsessed by elusive injustice. Not that anti-Semitism has any existential meaning for him, for by that time it had been banished from the British civilization, yet Abrahams feels that he—as a Jew—is perceived as something other than he wishes to be and deserves to be. He is able to attend Cambridge University, but he has to grapple with his problem at each step. His solution is to run against prejudice, against the shiftiness of his ideal—which is a blemish on the otherwise-superb face of *his* view of Englishness. He must outrun the feeling of measured outrage which constantly invades him, but the nebulous nature of the overtones and innuendoes that torment him are inescapable. He can never simply win or lose because his conflict is with the subtler shades of human dispositions.

The other man, a Scottish divinity student and missionary, Eric Liddell, runs because he is a true believer, a model Christian, a devout man of sublime religious sentiments, a Scottish romantic. He *feels* that God likes him when he runs. It sounds trite, but it conceals a deep truth of disarming pulchritude, for what he has in mind and tries to express is that God approves of the ultimate human effort to achieve some magnitude, that such exertion beautifies humanness itself—which is, in point of fact, one of the most intrinsic tenets of the Judeo-Christian philosophy, setting it apart from any other religion or system of thought. So Liddell gives Him the toil of his will and the efforts of his muscles and is gratified by His giving him victories.

Abrahams and Liddell ran in an era when sport was something more than winning, money and sleazy celebrity. It was a school of civility, ennobling emotions, fairness, gentlemanliness and comity. To make this point, the movie assembles an astounding wealth of visual accessories which in turn support its central directive—to convey the long-forgotten truth that the quality of existential details is interconnected with the quality of characters, emotions, attitudes, impulses. Personalized decency is somehow more believable amid the paraphernalia of British culture at its finest. The paneling of Cambridge University's refectory, the Scottish tweeds, the women's art-déco fashions, the faces which represent normal people all tell something about form, which becomes substance, and about the very notion of quality—the key value of Western civilization.

The unintentional irony of the movie is in its timing, in the misdirected nostalgia—the grandeur of the English ethos defended by a Jew, who is a bit pretentious in his quest for acceptance of his genuine worth, and by a slightly corny but righteous Christian, whose passionate faith might make the world better. These are perhaps two of the most extinct moral propositions of today's England—where Cambridge means the university of Kim Philby and Anthony Blount, where culture means The Rolling Stones and punk rock, where politics means comrade Viscount Tony Benn and where sport means eager participation in the Moscow Olympics. The former empire—whose most recent glimpse of cultural glory came from the Beatles—has a long way to go to salvage its own spirit. Both the Christian and the Jew in *Chariots of Fire* believe in something—and belief in *anything* is a long-forgotten human condition in the Piccadilly Circus neighborhood. But if England can still come up with a movie like this, a movie which challenges the universal "yecch!" of the Western cultural malaise, perhaps not everything is in ruin. Perhaps the shattered pieces of former British splendor can, here and there, fall into place and challenge the forces of seedy naturalism and abomination that occupy our realm of images and imagination. This movie somehow touches the raw nerve of latent human longings. By doing this, it can have a salutary impact on the desperate, the jaded, the disoriented who crowd the darkness of the movie houses of the Western world.

—*Eric Shapearo*

"*Chariots of Fire* strikes me as the most reactionary film I've seen in some time."
—Michael H. Seitz
The Progressive

* * *

Gallipoli; Directed by Peter Weir; Screenplay by David Williamson; Based on a story by Peter Weir; Paramount Pictures.

'Breaker' Morant; Directed by Bruce Beresford; Adapted from a play by Kenneth G. Ross; A New World-Quartet/Films Inc. release.

***True Confessions;* Directed by Ulu Grosbard; Screenplay by John Gregory Dunne and Joan Didion; Based on a novel by John Gregory Dunne; United Artists.**

***The French Lieutenant's Woman;* Directed by Karel Reisz; Screenplay by Harold Pinter; Based on a novel by John Fowles; United Artists.**

by Gary S. Vasilash

Gallipoli, as practically everyone seems to know, was almost then-British First Lord of the Admiralty Winston

Mr. Vasilash is associate editor of Manufacturing Engineering.

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Churchill's undoing. Basil Liddell Hart, in *Churchill Revised,* dryly notes, "Over the Dardanelles, his tendency to 'rush his fences' became still more evident and the vision apparent in his conception was marred partly by his own fault in overlooking practical difficulties and logistical needs." Which is just one way of saying that Churchill should have made sure that he had adequate troop strength vis-à-vis the Turks before he acted in what sounds like a halfhearted British attempt against the Dardanelles. Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* graphically presents another way of making that statement, one that is written in the blood of innocents.

As the film unfolds, one comes to know and admire two young Australians, Archie and Frank, who both volunteer for a baptism by fire at Gallipoli. Archie is 18, legally too young to join up, but he wants to fight for the British Empire; he feels that it is right. Frank joins for sounder reasons: if the semioutcast Irish youth becomes an officer in the Light Horse, his financial and amorous relationships will both be improved. It's obvious that things aren't going to turn out well for the two. Still, the movie is able to engender a feeling of identification with at least one of the two—either the idealist or the pragmatist—so that the fairly predictable ending doesn't evoke a yawn. Indeed, the Australian troops, pawns of a British commander who doesn't have the slightest idea of what is actually going on, are sent out of the trenches to die like men for their homeland and their families. They are moral men, and it hurts to see them lost as a result of overlooked "practical difficulties and logistical needs." Whether this is the sense of war, every war, all wars in history, remains debatable, and, in all fairness, it must be said that the Australian director does not go for a cheap ideological exclamation mark.

There is also predictable death at the end of *'Breaker' Morant,* and once again, it is because the British felt that they could use the lives of Australians like children use toys—at least that's what Bruce Beresford seems to be saying. Three Australian soldiers, who felt they were doing their duty in the Boer War, are shown undergoing a court martial, which turns out to be nothing but a kangaroo court. One feels a bitter disgust for Kitchener of Khartoum, as convoluted foreign-policy considerations take the place of elemental justice.

Still, the men sentenced to hard labor, or to death, continue to be sentimental about their country; they feel that what they did was best for Australia, even if they were abused by the Empire. One of them writes a final letter to his wife as his coffin is being built on the other side of the stockade wall. "God Bless Australia," he pens on the folded missive. In any recent American film, these words would be intended as either sarcastic or stupid; here they sound sincere.

In both of these films Australia is shown as a country with its heart in the right place, but one which is under the control of an Empire that still treats it as a place to ship convicts. Quite a difference from the modish American exertions that show America's fighting men as spaced-out foot soldiers commanded by lunatic officers.

America has always been a Protestant country, and, as such, there has in America always been a general suspicion of the Catholic Church, the election of John Kennedy notwithstanding. After all, priests wear all sorts of unusual garb, clouds of incense hover like spirits amid the statuary and frescoes, and everybody knows that the Pope controls everything (and perhaps even more). Until John Paul II, many non-Catholics felt it perfectly proper to bring up the corruption of the Church in the days of the Medici whenever the papacy was discussed. A few years ago, Sally Field starred in a television show, "The Flying Nun," which was based on what was supposed to be perceived as the absurd habit she wore, one which, taking her weight and prevailing atmospheric conditions into account, became aerodynamically efficient. "Silly Catholics!" the trivial but symptomatic show seemed to say. And, as we may recall, before the attempt on his life, John Paul II was often presented in the American media as the Skiing Pope. But many Americans would rather dwell on what they know is the seamy side of the Church, something which is thought to be pervasive at the lower levels, now that the days of centralized Popish Plots are past. The John Cardinal Cody "scandal" is a case in point: innuendo was light-years ahead of information.

True Confessions is a contribution to the cult of fascination with the "dark side" of the Church. "How amusing it is to see a priest dead in a whorehouse!" we are supposed to think. "Sicily is practically right next door to the Vatican, so is it any wonder that the Church is hand-in-hand with criminal types?" we are supposed to extrapolate. Thus, *True Confessions* becomes *Chinatown* with a twist. A corrupt big businessman is replaced by corrupt, nominally Catholic, big businessmen.

An honest priest gets packed off to the California desert. An aggressive young priest—finally—gets religion and follows. And what of the corrupt big businessmen, what about their mutually beneficial contributions to the Church? No need to answer, for, of course, everybody knows . . . .

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Art, of course, is an illusion, though many frequently overlook that fact and treat it as a direct representation of reality. Increasingly, modern novelists are calling attention to their form so that people will recognize fiction as fiction. Some, like John Fowles, do it well by masterfully manipulating time, while others take a more heavy-handed approach and spill type all over the page.

A question that film-makers interested in doing the same thing might pose to themselves is: How does one make a serious film that says something about the nature of acting, one that calls attention to itself as a work of art, but which doesn't collapse under the weight of undue seriousness or have the substance of a trivial bubble? The filmed version of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is an answer to that question. The film functions both as an entertainment and as a commentary on acting.

When the film opens, Meryl Streep, famous Hollywood actress, is shown being prepped, getting ready to walk out on the Cobb at Lyme Bay as Sarah, "the French lieutenant's woman." It almost seems as if this is not the actual start of the film, but rather a short preview, "The Making of . . ." But then the action begins, and the actress becomes a character. We forget about the opening until we see Charles Smithson answer a telephone—in 1867?—which makes us aware that he is actually Jeremy Irons, an actor, whom we might remember seeing in the British television adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited.*

Back and forth the film goes, but in a manner more complex than a play within a play. That is, there's a real actress performing as an actress, who plays the role of a fictional character who is based on a character in a novel, a fictional character who pretends to be something that she isn't—which is at least five levels. Yet an average filmgoer, one who simply wants to see a modern Victorian melodrama (i.e. one in which the so-called prudes are shown to be as licentious as goats), can watch the film without being unduly disturbed by the Chinese-box effect. □

MUSIC

Against Atonality

by Robert R. Reilly

"What if, we may ask now, the 12-tone revolution was not really necessary and it has taken us half a century to find that out?" When such a question as this appears in the *New York Times* "Arts and Leisure" section (12/9/79), one may safely assume that the academic stranglehold of the dodecaphonic disciples of Schoenberg et al. has been broken. It was a stranglehold that nearly suffocated modern music; rather, it was almost modern music's suicide. This suicide was attempted by a systematic fragmentation of the language of music, the same fragmentation that is easily discernable in so much modern painting and sculpture, wherein a single component or ingredient of art is elevated into its own autonomous, isolated whole.

After a half-century's drubbing, melodic thought and tonal structure are once again emerging in music, at first painfully, slowly, cautiously, as if from a coma induced by a terrible beating, but now almost ebulliently. I know of no better prescription for this recovery than George Rochberg's essay on his "Third String Quartet" in which he speaks of "turning away from . . . the cultural pathology of my own time." That pathology is characterized by a wholesale rejection of the past and the "pursuit of the one-idea, uni-dimensional work and gesture which seems to have dominated the esthetics of art in the 20th century."

What are the origins of this pathology? The answer is adumbrated in the opening *New York Times* question as to the necessity of the 12-tone revolution. The fact is that the 12-tone revolution was thought to be necessary not because it was needed, but because it was historically inevitable (due to the supposed exhaustion of the tonal system). In other words, this cultural pathology was rooted in modern ideology and translated into a musical dialectic which turns into strong hints of gnosticism, as in Schoenberg's own case. There is certainly such a thing as ideology in music, and to no one's surprise, its influence has been reductionist. Like anything else that can be affected by ideology, music has suffered from what Eric Voegelin calls "a loss of reality." The loss was purposeful. The source of much "originality" in modern art has become not creation but destruction, a process of taking away what has been given—not only by tradition but by nature itself. Of course the principal premise of modern ideology is that wholesale destruction is necessary for the development of the truly new. We were thus given in music a second-hand, or ersatz, reality which operated according to its own self-invented and independent rules divorced from the very nature of sound. In their attempt to discredit tonality as a matter of mere convention, the 12-toners subjected audiences to all manner of manufactured and systematized noises. The audiences fled—in spite of the critics' barbs that they were musical rubes. Abandoned by and eventually unconcerned about their audience, the dodecaphonists shed any remaining restraints on their sterile hermeticism and sank into total incom-

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prehensibility.

Now, however, we are hearing refreshing voices crying out "The Emperor has no clothes." It is revealing to read of the reactions to the good news in Walter Simmons's account in *Fanfare* (June/July, 1981) of a seminar last spring in New York City on the state of modern music. He relates a number of examples provided by the participants —distinguished critics and composers —of "the coerciveness with which the 'traditional wing' of 20th century music has been suppressed by the academic musical establishment, and the degree to which dissent has been silenced through subtle forms of intimidation." One of the most harrowing examples is the critic for the *Village Voice,* for instance, who confessed that he admitted to himself his admiration for Benjamin Britten's music only after Rochberg had publicly rehabilitated it.

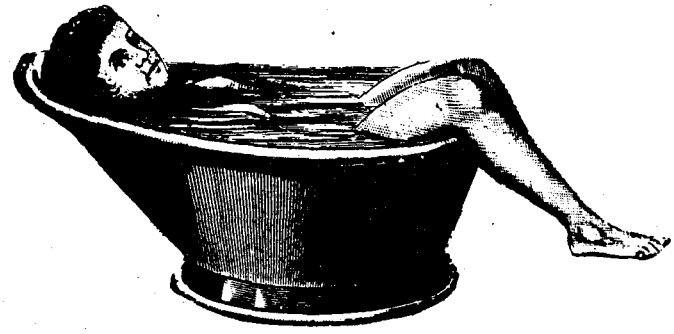
For this service alone, we should thank him. But there is also Rochberg's recent music, an attempted renewal "by regaining contact with the tradition and means of the past, to re-emerge as a spiritual force with reactivated powers of melodic thought, rhythmic pulse, and large-scale structure." His "Quintet for Piano and String Quartet" (1975), now available on Nonesuch Records (N-78011), follows three years after his "Third String Quartet." It is a most interesting attempt at reintegrating the past into our musical consciousness, though it may be less than a totally satisfying musical whole. Rochberg, like T. S. Eliot, recalls the past by simply including it, sometimes literally, sometimes stylistically. In any event, one is often extra-musically reminded by the time-machine aspect of his music that this *is* an exercise in reclaiming the past.

This large "Quintet" (45:36) is laid out symmetrically, with three movements preceding a piano solo and three following. The outer movements are atonal; the middle movements mix tonal and atonal elements; the inner movements are tonal, surrounding the murky, brooding piano solo. It is interesting that Rochberg characterizes this structure as "a progression from dark to light, to dark again." The "dark" music is bearable, and the "light" quite delightful, particularly the third movement, which sounds like a Schubertian romp, and the fifth, which is a lovely *adagietto.* The middle, transitional music, especially the sixth movement, is fascinating: the 19th century fighting it out with the 20th. The newcomer to modern music will no doubt find this composition puzzling, but anyone interested in Rochberg's reconstructive enterprise will perceive beauty and stimulation in it. The pressing and sound quality are good.

At the same New York modern-music conference, a *New York Times* music critic apparently confessed to a long-held, but hidden, admiration for the music of, among others, Samuel Barber. Even during the "reign of terror," I doubt that the popularity of Barber's music really declined. Though it was derided as old-fashioned and romantic, people apparently liked it, and will continue to do so precisely for those reasons. New World Records (NW 309) has released Barber's swan song, "Third Essay for Orchestra," Opus 47. Barber's romanticism remained, up to the end, undiminished. This is an opulent, luxuriant, melodic work. For these reasons it reminded me of John Williams's equally opulent and quite beautiful score for the movie *Dracula,* but, like movie music, I doubt if its grand gestures will have the staying power to hold one's attention.

The much larger work on this record is brash, splashy, "Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra" by the young composer John Corigliano. Corigliano is also known as a romantic; however, anyone whose tastes do not go beyond Barber might have a hard time recognizing it. But any ear acclimated to modern music will quickly recognize that the sometimes-aggressive modernisms in Corigliano's music are on the surface, that he has only orchestrally updated (with occasional tone clusters and dissonant effects) what might have been heard from Copland a few years ago. In fact a few passages do strongly remind me of Copland's wonderful "Clarinet Concerto." If I were initiating someone into Corigliano's music, I think I would begin with either his piano or oboe concerto, both of which are bravura showpieces as well. Certainly anyone who enjoyed those will like this virtuoso orgy. A large part of the excitement of both works on this record are due to Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic, who play them to the hilt, and to the superb sound and excellent pressing from New World Records.

Another refugee from the "long term tyranny which has brought contemporary music to its current state of constipation and paralysis" is Robert Muczynski whose words I quote from a letter he wrote to *Fanfare* in appreciation of their report on the New York modern-music conference. Helping break the logjam is Laurel Records, which has issued a disc of Muczynski's music,



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shared by two other tonal composers, Ernest Bloch and Paul Creston. Muczynski's "Dance Movements" (1963) and "A Serenade for Summer" (1976) on LR-110 could be classed as light music for chamber orchestra, but it is well enough constructed to delight the listener repeatedly. Muczynski notes in his letter that the most effective means of condemnation under the old tyranny was to say that one's music "sounds like . . ." Derivativeness was the kiss of death. Well, anyone who sounds like Mozart is fine with me, and Hummel's best piano concerto sounds just like Beethoven. So I mean no insult by saying, in the interest of placing his music for the reader, that Muczynski sounds, in places, like Copland, perhaps a little like Gail Kubik (who also sounds a bit like Copland), with a dash (in the "Serenade for Summer") of Malcolm Arnold. Or would it be fairer to say he is representative of what someone called our country's "mid-Western school of prairie classicism" (perhaps this should be changed to "prairie neo-romanticism")? In any event, his music is easily accessible and quite delightful. "A Serenade for Summer" is particularly beautiful.

The other side of the record features Bloch and Creston. Bloch's "Four Episodes for Chamber Orchestra" (1926) were written years after he had come to this country from Switzerland. The episodes are independent of each other: Humoresque Macabre, Obsession (the beginning of which sounds like Alan Hovhaness), Pastorale, Chinese Theatre. Sort of Bloch's version of "Ports of Call," except it has three psychological and only one geographic location. All have the character of impressions, and are enjoyable examples of this kind of descriptive music.

Creston's "Two Choric Dances" (1938) are short works whose stridency seems a bit overbearing, although I was most appreciative of the rare opportunity to hear some of his orchestral work. He speaks of these dances as abstract in conception, but they sound cinematic and dated. All in all, this disc is an enjoyable journey off the beaten path. It is enhanced by decent sound, good record surfaces and dedicated performances. □

THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

The Technology of Errors

At the time of this writing Mr. David Stockman, President Reagan's budget director, is still sitting in his office—sad perhaps, confused maybe, angry with himself certainly. What the future holds for him we don't know. But we do know that by not firing him on the spot, after the publication of his notorious interview with *Atlantic Monthly*, President Reagan has committed a grave mistake.

Those who defend the President's benignity point to Mr. Stockman's expertise and indispensability. We are skeptical about that argument. If Mr. Reagan cannot find a replacement with acumen and talent among genuinely conservative economic scholars and activists, it seems to us that he just does not understand the ideological movement which brought him to power. Such a circumstance is not rare, but a leader afflicted by such ignorance improves neither his society nor his own reputation. In pardoning Mr. Stockman, Mr. Reagan has betrayed one of the principles of what could be termed the new political morality—an ingredient of his own pre-electoral rhetoric, a basic premise of the conservative renewal of the American public and civic ethos. If a civil servant has doubts about what he's doing, his sacrosanct duty is to convey them to his official superior, his political comrade in arms, his ideological soul mate. If his doubts are not assuaged,

if they become a burden on his conscience, he should resign his position and *then* go public with his objections, reservations, opposition, discoveries and denunciations. This is the only way a man in public service can prove his honesty, integrity, responsibility and honor. If he confides his doubts to a journalist, the latter's probity notwithstanding, he automatically becomes a sort of Benedict Arnold. In America *anno Domini* 1981, journalists see disasters as news—thus they are principally interested in harm, abuse, ravage. Any portent of failure and defeat—personal, moral, mental—is for the journalist a good tiding: it promises him money, celebrity and even that spurious feeling of being a savior to his people. The contemporary American journalist sincerely believes that his attitude of indiscrimination toward the telling of everything "like it is" improves the world and enriches society. This shallow perception of politics, history and human affairs has—as recent times clearly demonstrate—inflicted irremediable impairment on our shared reality. The journalist epitomizes the banality of the evil of our lifetime, and Mr. Stockman is only the newest cadaver to be left behind on the trail of his allegedly well-meaning vampirism.

To expect an American journalist in Washington, D.C. to honor a confidence is to announce one's own mental debili-

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tation. Thus, unless Mr. Stockman had something more Machiavellian and damaging in mind when he poured his heart out, we must assume that he has proved to be—at least at this moment of his life, his computerized talents notwithstanding—an immature dimwit who has done injury both to the men who trusted him and to the serious sociopolitical concepts he once claimed to espouse and admire. By failing to fire Mr. Stockman immediately, Mr. Reagan missed his opportunity to salvage any esteem from friend and foe alike.

Foreign Policy

The Reagan administration's insistence that Saudi Arabia be the cornerstone of our Middle Eastern policy strikes us more and more as the best joke of the post-World War II era. With a sense of timing that beats all past masters of historical comedy, the teams of conceptualists and tacticians which advise Mr. Reagan on foreign policy are promoting the hilarious idea that a functional political alliance with an operetta country is possible. The idea of deterring Soviet designs in that area with the help of heaps of money stashed away in Swiss and Manhattan banks would make Gilbert & Sullivan salivate: the high burlesque inherent in the profound thought that an ideological warfare and a military brotherhood-in-arms can be achieved through American military cooperation with the Las Vegas of Islam would be quite funny, were it not so pregnant with catastrophic implications. Hitler had no gold or dollars in the First National Bank, but he nearly conquered the world. The Saudi parvenus may own half of Fort Knox, yet the Soviets, if they decided to, could obliterate them, with all their wives and camels, within 20 minutes.

The liberal media—chiefly those which appear to have some murky stake in encouraging love for the Saudis in American hearts (Time-Life, Inc. leads the way in this sentimental affair) are trying to promote an image of a pure, traditional, deeply religious, moral and sane Arab society. Their line is that the Saudi moralists reject American decadence as the only obstacle to complete ideological communion between the two nations. America—according to their explanations—is drowning in the

slime of West 42nd Street-style porno, a Sodom which every good Arab views with revulsion. In point of fact, what the Saudis have in mind when they talk about American decay and filth is not *Penthouse* or Plato's Retreat but the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, pluralism, political tolerance and our notion of freedom. As Lawrence Durrell showed clearly in *The Alexandria Quartet,* Islamic lenity for sexual kinkiness and vice would leave *Hustler's* publishing executives in speechless awe. It's not our transgressions in things sensual that make a Saudi princeling contemptuous of American degeneracy; it's our freedom for everybody, our legal fairness, our veneration for efficient work, our sense of personal responsibility and our rejection of living at someone else's expense that he finds corrupt and perverted.

The press has widely circulated a picture of President Reagan, taken during the Cancun conference just as he opened his arms, in a most affectionate gesture of warm sincerity, to embrace Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia. We think that, to complement the counsel he is receiving from his wise men, Mr. Reagan would do well to reread his copy of *A Thousand and One Nights.* He might then remember something about Arab ceremonial greetings, wherein their open arms emerge from flowing robes in which it is so easy to hide daggers—their best and only friends.

Modesty

Former Vice President Walter Mondale, writing about himself in the *New York Times,* has this to say:

> . . . I have been and remain a force in American politics. And as a once and future political leader . . .

Of course, what Mr. Mondale wanted to say is that he will remain in American politics. Whether as a force remains to be seen. And whether he'll be a political leader in the future, only the future can tell.

Mr. Mondale is now a visiting professor at three universities in Minnesota. We are not familiar with the educational level of those sites of learning, but we hope that Mr. Mondale teaches neither logic, nor English composition, nor any course which deals with primary human virtues.

Nixon Returns to Duke

Continuing a tradition of recent years, Duke University will allow pornographic films to be shown on campus again this fall. If any faculty voices question the relationship between such movies and Duke's motto, *"Eruditio et Religio,"* there will arise suggestions that the University's anachronistic slogan be altered. Although these professors find material to promote learning in "Fritz the Cat," they find no redeeming social value in the unexpurgated papers of the thirty-seventh President of the United States. Universities open to discussions of "Fritz

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The Dartmouth Review

P.O. Box 343
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Very impressive. —**Ronald Reagan**

A significant development. I have followed with interest the trend of *The Dartmouth Review*. —**George Will**

The Dartmouth Review is a vibrant, joyful, provocative challenge to the regnant but brittle liberalism for which American colleges are renowned. It is serious, in the best sense of the word; it is lively, it has spirit, and it has a considerable capacity to meditate its own weaknesses.
—**William F. Buckley, Jr.**

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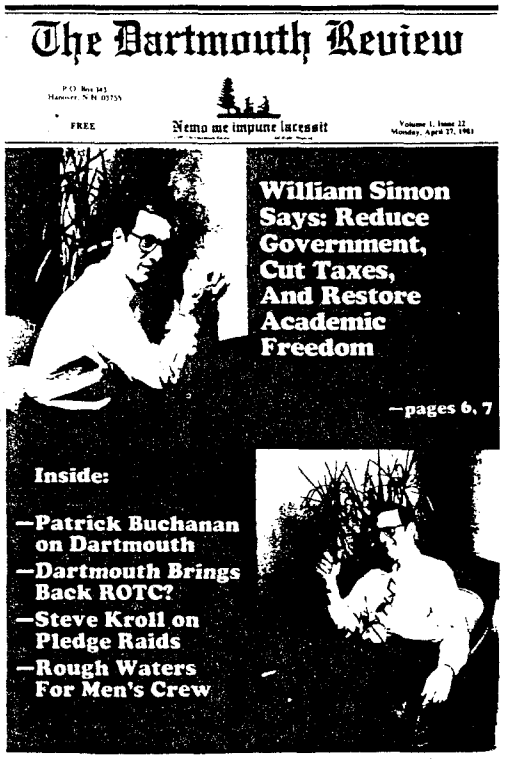
The Dartmouth Review

FREE

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William Simon Says: Reduce Government, Cut Taxes, And Restore Academic Freedom

—pages 6, 7

Inside:

—Patrick Buchanan on Dartmouth

—Dartmouth Brings Back ROTC?

—Steve Kroll on Pledge Raids

—Rough Waters For Men's Crew

The Dartmouth Review was founded a year ago to combat the decadent liberalism that, in the sixties, took over the educational establishment.

The Review is important not only in that it has effectively challenged the liberal monopoly in the Ivy League, but also in that it has established itself as an important subset of the Reagan coalition.

In the last few weeks, *The Review* was reported on in the *New York Times*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Boston Sunday Globe*, and the *Chicago Tribune*.

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the Cat" are closed to the records of Richard Nixon. One is forced to wonder just what benefit this exclusion confers on American education.

Une Petite Crapule

In the forthcoming California senatorial race, one contender for the Democratic Party's nomination is Mr. Gore Vidal, a novelist. He has perfect credentials for a certain not-negligible segment of the state's voting constituency. His appeal to this group is through an aberrationist program which might be encapsulated as freedom from any responsibility—moral, civic, etc. His tenets and goals, perhaps not announced publicly, will encompass the abolition of the human sense of normalcy, which will be replaced with the sacrosanct tenet of the emancipation of instincts —*all* instincts, with no discrimination whatsoever. As an impeccable deviate and an unrestricted nihilist, Mr. Vidal can count on large donors and influential supporters throughout Los Angeles and San Francisco: their liberal honor will guarantee their devotion—with a sentimental mist in the radiant eyes of film stars, movie tycoons, sitcom poets and talk-show philosophers—to his campaign.

Mr. Vidal has recently published an article in (where else?) *The Nation* which may help the California voters to assess the newest personality on the West Coast political scene. In it, he viciously berates American Jews for their alleged reluctance to work out a concept for a new popular front in which they would, together with homosexuals and lesbians (who are, according to Mr. Vidal's gospel, the most oppressed "minorities"), combat the establishment's yoke. He seems unclear as to what he means by the "establishment": by dint of origin, money, family, money, sexual refinement, once again money, and his utterly plutocratic lifestyle, Mr. Vidal himself is the epitome of the Waspish establishment. Which does not impede him from hating the society that gave him everything (even the right to openly defend pederasty) with a vicious and genuine hatred. Here are a few gems of his mindset:

—He believes we are in the "last days of empire": "empire," in Mr. Vidal's kinky lingo, means American democracy, and since he's absolutely positive of our imminent demise, he naturally wishes us ill, if only to prove the sharpness of his diagnosis;

—"American evangelical Christians" are, for Mr. Vidal, "natural fascists";

—Mr. Vidal's sense of past and present moral culture consists of a rather simple evaluation: "To deny giving physical expression to those [homosexual] desires may be pleasing to Moses and St. Paul and Freud, but these three rabbis are aberrant figures whose nomadic values are not those of the thousands of other tribes that live or have lived on the planet. Women's and gay liberation are simply small efforts to free men and women from this trio."

—Having formulated his own virulent anti-Semitism, he proposes an alliance with Jews: "Since . . . [Jews] are going to be in the same gas chambers as the blacks and the faggots, I would suggest a cease-fire and a common front against the common enemy, whose kindly voice is that of Ronald Reagan . . ."

He thus concludes by suggesting that Ronald Reagan is preparing some sort of American Auschwitz. About a contemporary with Mr. Vidal's psycho-moral profile and political methods, Stendhal once wrote a brief denomination: *"une petite crapule."* □

JOURNALISM

The South *Omnis Vincet*

Given the regional origins and ideological predispositions of Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter, one might wonder what has happened to Southern politics. Has the land of John C. Calhoun forsaken its birthright for a mess of pottage cooked up by the *Washington Post?* Has Andrew Young become the quintessential Southern politician? Will Mississippi be transmogrified into the Massachusetts of the South?

A solid "no" will answer these questions, for John East and Jesse Helms are still more typical of Southern politics than Andrew Young. But a different situation confronts those who are curious about intellectual and cultural life south of the Potomac. Despite the lingering reverberations of H. L. Mencken's "The Sahara of the Bozart," the culture industry thrives in the South; no longer is an oboist as scarce in Dixie as a statue of William Tecumseh Sherman in Atlanta. But just as certainly as that oboist exists, he almost assuredly follows the dictates of an alien culture, for values and mores once anathema in the South have slipped across the Mason-Dixon line in recent years. Major newspapers such as the *Nashville Tennessean* and the *Atlanta Constitution* seem bent on molding themselves in the image of the *New York Times*. The faculties of major Southern universities—the University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina, to name two—have more than their fair share of Marxists and holdovers from the so-called counterculture of the

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1960's. Chic young Southern women decorate their coffee tables with copies of *The New Yorker* and *Rolling Stone,* while John Irving and Erica Jong replace Faulkner and Eudora Welty in their bookcases. The offspring of ardent Trinitarians now worship a new trinity: marijuana, rock music and polymorphous sexuality. In the name of fun and enlightenment many Southerners—especially in the region's burgeoning cities and suburbs—have encouraged, or at the very least condoned, the growth of an alien culture. And when the culture changes, can politics be far behind?

Since the demise of the Southern Agrarian movement at the end of the 1930's, the South has lacked a focal point for the defense of a conservative intellectual and cultural tradition. Individual voices have been raised—a Richard Weaver here, a Flannery O'Connor there—but no concerted effort has been made to give broad and coherent expression to what oftentimes has been reduced to the stoical mutterings of men forced to stand by helplessly as twilight thickens into darkness.

In the fall of 1979 a group of Southern writers and scholars decided that the time had come to reverse the retreat toward Appomattox; the moment demanded one of Stonewall Jackson's dashes through a Blue Ridge gap or one of Bedford Forrest's hell-for-leather assaults on a seemingly impregnable position. Led by Thomas Fleming, a classicist, and Clyde Wilson, editor of the John C. Calhoun Papers at the University of South Carolina, these men established *The Southern Partisan,* a quarterly journal dedicated to the defense of Southern tradition.

The survival rate for small magazines that challenge the spirit of the age is not high, so the future of the *Partisan* is uncertain. But oaks grow from acorns, and at the very least, the *Partisan* provides a gathering place for discontented conservative intellectuals in the South. And no one ever accused Southerners of shrinking from a fight. Victory? Well, Southerners have had few of these since 1865, and perhaps they no longer seek the elusive laurels of the victor. But more important, Southerners, above all other Americans, know the answer to a question posed by a Southerner, Walker Percy: "Which is worse, to die with T. J. Jackson at Chancellorsville or live with Johnny Carson in Burbank?" □

Precision Work

The Soviet-made and -supplied acid rain may be eating away at the lungs of little children in Cambodia but nobody in Western Europe is marching against this unfortunate circumstance. A Soviet submarine may bring an atomic projectile within a couple of miles of the Swedish coast, but only a handful of citizens protests in Stockholm. Remember the Swedish marches against the U.S. when the Marines tried to protect those Vietnamese who later became the boat people? Scandinavian marchers remain unmoved now, when hundreds of Afghan villages are covered by Soviet napalm that scorches mothers feeding their babies.

But what can we do about it? Nothing, as long as we have *Time* magazine, which helps the Soviet propaganda machine with this kind of precise "information":

> Europe's fears are so ripe for exploitation by the Soviets that the Kremlin is naturally suspected of financing some of Western Europe's peace groups. That belief seemed to be confirmed earlier this month when a minor Soviet diplomat in Copenhagen was expelled by the Danish government after reportedly being caught passing money to peace organizations. But there is no concrete evidence that Moscow has been funding pacifist groups on a large scale . . .

So we have reports that the Soviets have financed peace demonstrations in Denmark. Yet for *Time* this is of no significance, because it was only a "minor Soviet diplomat." For *Time* only the sight of Mr. Gromyko handing out cash in front of Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens would be considered "concrete evidence" of Soviet complicity in staging and orchestrating festivals of anti-American hatred. President Johnson complained that the American press never seriously investigated Soviet subversion during the Vietnam War. Small wonder. Their reports on My Lai, etc. were so much more saleable. □

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